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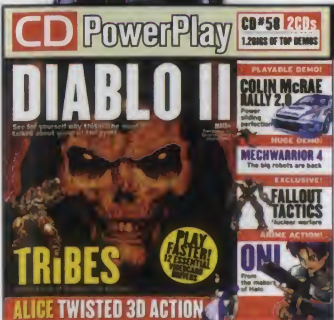
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IS LARA**

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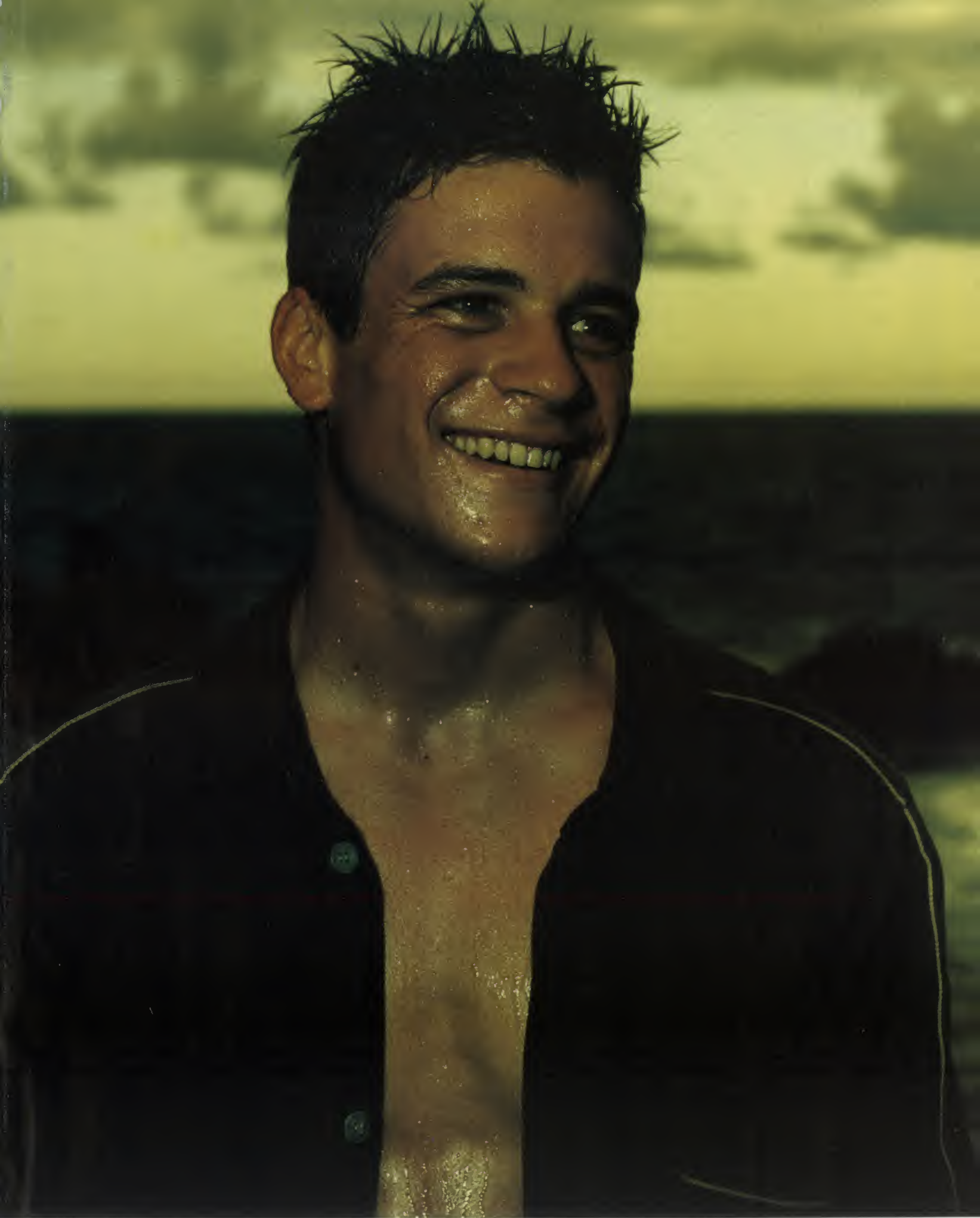
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Brendan Hearne. Surfer. Nike Fly Front Pique Shirt.
NIKE 0150

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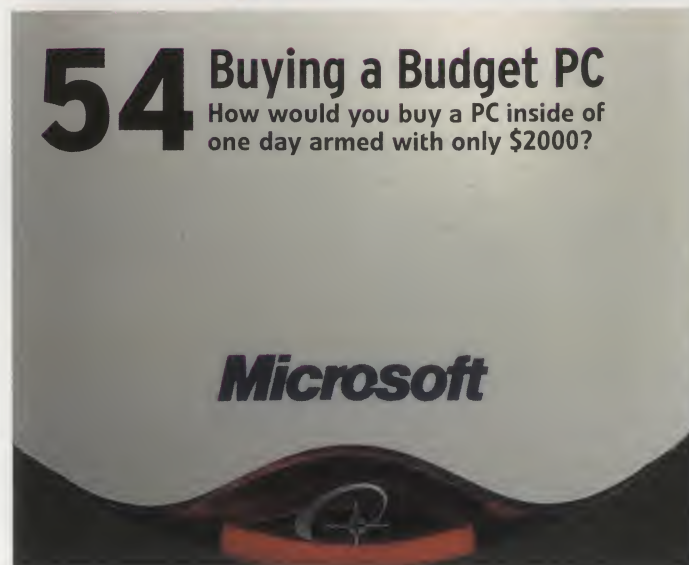
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POWER TO THE PEOPLE



DAVID WILDGOOSE
I created myself as a stylish midfielder at West Ham Utd

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Champ Man 00/01

Well, it's done, as 3D Realms might say. PC PowerPlay has gone gold and been sent off for duplication. We're happy with the final product: Anthony's ecstatic with it, Chantal's quietly pleased with it, Hugh's enthused with it - even Daniel doesn't mind it much. I hope you find satisfaction, too.

So what's changed? For starters, there is the PowerTest. You may have noticed it mentioned on the cover. Inside, Hugh and Anthony have brought together the 15 newest videocards on the market and put them through a rigorous testing process. The aim: to determine which card offers the superior service to gamers like yourselves. Turn to p86 to find out who performed the best. While there, note the irony that our tech-iest feature ever has resulted in our art-iest intro spread ever.

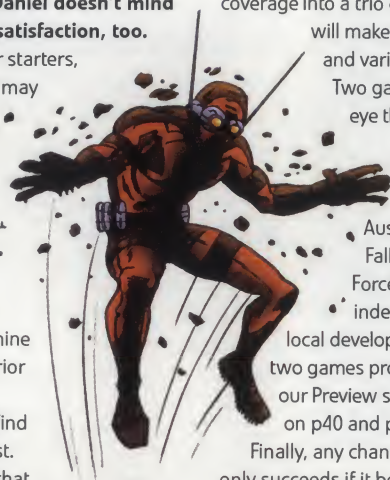
Spotlight has been revamped as well. To complement the regular assortment of games

info, the latest hardware and online news now also feature prominently within its expanded page count. It's all part of the plan to make PCPP feel like one coherent magazine rather than segregating the games, hardware and internet coverage into a trio of discrete sections. And, it will make for a far more interesting and varied read, of course.

Two games in particular caught our eye this month. Though they both look extremely promising, perhaps the most notable aspect is that they're both Australian made. I'm referring to Fallout Tactics and Freedom Force, naturally. It's a sure sign indeed of the healthy state of the local development community that these two games provide the twin highlights of our Preview section. Witness for yourself on p40 and p44, respectively.

Finally, any change we make to the magazine only succeeds if it benefits the readers. So, please write in (or post on the forums at www.pcpowerplay.com.au) and let us know what you think...

david@next.com.au



THE PC POWERPLAY CREW

This month Team Arena has made us question which team we're on...



ANTHONY FORDHAM
Armidale Waratahs
Under 14's B-side

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Nekkid Twister



HUGH NORTON-SMITH
I bat for both teams
at the best of times...

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Twister



DANIEL STAINES
Whichever one
you're not on

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Thief Gold



HARRY MARAGOS
The UT anti-Q3 team

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Unreal Tournament



CHANTAL BAIRLE
Team Satan

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Patience



JAMES COTTEE
The fruity team

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Wizball



MIKE WILCOX
Hey, I'm freelance!

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Red Faction



MJ DES MCNICHOLAS
I'm always on the
winning team

WHAT I'M PLAYING
B-17 2



CHRISTIAN READ
The A Team. That's A
for arsehole

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Call to Power II



JOHN DEWHURST
Young Team. With
apologies to Mogwai

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Tony Hawk 2



RYAN HOVINGH
The Last Samurai

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Fallout 2



TIMOTHY C BEST
The home team.
They have all the
cheerleaders

WHAT I'M PLAYING
Sacrifice

PC PowerPlay

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Battle Isle: Darkspace

FORGET FREELANCER, THERE'S A NEW SPACE SIM ONLINE

DETAILS

GENRE

Space Sim

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Palestar

PUBLISHER

Blue Byte

DUE

2nd Qtr

URL

www.bluebyte.com

With the battles of Homeworld plus the economy of Privateer, Darkspace could be a stellar success

Darkspace looks set to perhaps steal Freelancer's thunder





Don't worry,
there are
still isles in
the game,
like that one
down there

Why does every single space shooter ever invented make it a point of policy to couple the player with retarded AI assistants? Your wingman, your squadron buddies, your crewmembers... they're always idiots. And usually their idiocy is not the normal, annoyingly harmless type either; it's often downright dangerous. It's the "No, you *&#!, get out of the way of the missile!" type of idiocy that makes us all curse dodgy AI for being the hellspawn that it is. Well, curse no more. **Darkspace is coming.**

Departing from its traditional turn-based wargaming, the next Battle Isle game is the fleet based online space shooter to hammer all other space shooters into a fine, game scented debris. The premise is simple: you've got a ship, everyone else partaking in the online universe has a ship, now get out there and make friends. Fast. Why? Well, not for simple social reasons, mind you. What you'll be doing with your newly acquired comrades is forming a fleet to traverse and conquer the known galaxy. And there'll be no stupid AI squadmates as hindrances... only stupid human squadmates. But hey, at least you can hurt their feelings when you hurl abuse at them.

Nebula effects

But there is so much more to Darkspace than mere battles, conquests and screaming general abuse. Interestingly, a firmly entrenched system of checks and balances determines how a particular player will advance within his or her fleet or within the game universe as a whole.

Be the uber-hero and capture an enemy planet singlehandedly? That'll get you a big dollop of experience points to use to upgrade your ship and rank among the squadron. Blow up your own fusion reactor, killing millions of your own people? Well, see that brown little scout ship over there? The one with the sticky tape holding the wings together? That's yours, that is.

Technically, the game is superb. Utilising the Medusa engine, Bluebyte has managed to paint a star-studded mosaic

of ships, planets and, of course, nebulae that is frankly stunning. This is complemented by a play mechanic which incorporates traditional realtime strategy action with massively multiplayer, squad based, tactical combat. Impressive is often a word that comes to mind when considering this game.

What Bluebyte is attempting to do with Darkspace is big. The game appears to be an attempt to combine the much-touted play mechanics of Everquest with the austere respectability of such space sim classics as Homeworld and X-Wing coupled with just a dash of Starcraft and Reach for The Stars. What kind of strange stew this odd concoction of ingredients will result in remains to be seen, but from what we've witnessed, it looks tasty. Real tasty.

Daniel Staines

WHY DARKSPACE DESERVES A SECOND LOOK...

■ Well, just look at the screenshots for one

■ It's squad combat, in space, with real people

■ Conquering the galaxy with a bunch of friends appeals

■ Three words: No Dodgy AI

Evil Twin

AFTER ALICE COMES ANOTHER GOTH-TINGED ACTION ADVENTURE



DETAILS

GENRE

Freaky Platformer

MULTIPLAYER

No

DEVELOPER

In Utero

PUBLISHER

Ubi Soft

DUE

June

URL

www.ubisoft.com



Nice pad, kid. But really I just popped round for some sugar



Messiah meets Mario - except on even more serious drugs



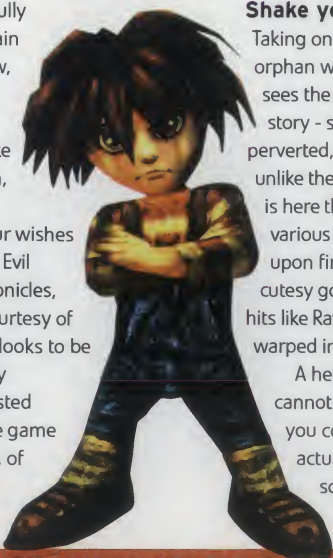


Mindful of the perils of climbing ladders in games, our hero pauses in preparation

After seeing the decidedly macabre, Tim Burton-esque, French flick *The City of Lost Children*, like many other gothically inclined gamers out there, I sat back, thoughtfully rubbed my chin and said: "You know, they should make a game out of stuff like that."

And then four months later, when they actually did make a game out of *The City of Lost Children*, like many other gothically inclined and now very disappointed gamers, I sat back, thoughtfully rubbed my chin again and said: "You know, they should definitely make game out of stuff like that... except much, much better."

Well, for once our wishes have been granted. Evil Twin: Cyprien's Chronicles, coming this year courtesy of developer In Utero, looks to be the most undeniably depressing and twisted platform/adventure game to date...excepting, of course, Alice. That's just strange that is.



Shake your head

Taking on the role of Cyprien, a tangled orphan with emotional problems, Evil Twin sees the player - via a suitably cheesy story - sucked into a nightmare world of perverted, garish fantasy that is not at all unlike the set of a Nine Inch Nails film-clip. It is here that you must guide Cyprien on various platform adventure quests that upon first glance appear to combine the cutesy good fun of button-bashing console hits like Rayman and Banjo Kazooie with the warped imagination of the In Utero team.

A healthy degree of twistedness cannot be a bad thing, especially when you consider how great the game actually looks. Go on; look at the screens that accompany this First Look and then try and *not* shake



your head in disbelief anticipation. Of course, Evil Twin was originally intended to be an animated feature so you'd expect at least some evidence of visual wizardry but - hey - whichever way you look at 'em those screens don't get any less purty.

Technical snazzyness aside, the question remains: what have we got on our fickle little hands here? Well, what we've got is Mario meets Edward Scissorhands with a nice dash of Lara Croft thirdperson goodness thrown in for fun's sake. What we've got here is an excuse for angsty teenagers worldwide to play computer games while wearing white face makeup and purple lipstick. What Evil Twin presents us with, people, is gawth... and in the hippest way imaginable, too.

Daniel Staines

WHY EVIL TWIN DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

■ It looks like it was made by a very, very high Tim Burton

■ It's full of that bad '50s horror schlockiness we all love

■ The graphics are enough to make God drool

■ It's a chance for us all to be gawth. Oh, the pain...

World War II Europe in Gunfire

IT'S A WORLD WAR II RTS GAME... WE THINK

DETAILS

GENRE

Realtime Strategy

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Dream Enterprise

PUBLISHER

E2 Soft

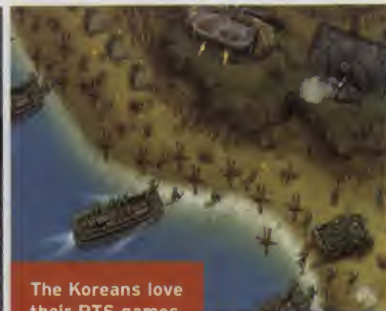
DUE

2nd Qtr

URL

www.dream21c.co.kr

Now there's a "gap of latitude" if we've ever seen one...



The Koreans love their RTS games, doncha know?





Although clearly mocked-up, shots like these show immense promise

World War II: Europe in Gunfire is an historically accurate RTS developed in Korea by newcomers Dream Enterprise. Unfortunately, this is about all we can say for sure at the moment. Now I know it's very easy to make fun of someone for whom English is a second language, and I know there's a long and shameful Australian tradition of taking the piss of foreigners, but the developers at Dream Enterprise are not ordinary people. They call themselves the Company, like some kind of shadowy New World Order and they expect that we will, when the time comes, pay good money for their game. To this end, we offer what we think is a fairly accurate translation of Dream Enterprise's press releases and game information, so you will be able to make an informed choice when the game is finally released.

We are fairly sure Dream Enterprise believes World War II games have, until now, had too narrow a scope, focusing on squads, or were only turn-based. They feel a large-scale all-action WWII RTS will breathe new life into the genre. So they've combined RTS action and resource management with an

element of role-playing. It's not clear how, but it appears EIG will feature hero characters, like in Starcraft, who help drive the story.

Historical units

There is a lot of attention also being paid to the mechanics of WWII warfare and technology, with historical units prominent. You can also expect to re-enact the key battles in the war. Check out the Normandy invasion (above), Zeppelins and all.

Dream Enterprise has also added some 3D functionality to the sprite-based gameworld. Once again, the details of this aren't clear, but the following paragraph from a press release should answer some questions: "[Europe in Gunfire] improves Property of Game and Strategy by Changing Height of Sky... For example, the height of combat plane in real World War II is 8000-10000 feet, the bombers have 10000-15000 feet in latitude, in this light, the Company create a gap of latitude between combat plane and bomber." Which we think means you can fly some planes underneath others.

Also interesting, EIG will automatically change camouflage on

your units depending on mission terrain. Dream Enterprise also promise an impressive array of environmental effects, including the staple rain, snow and ice, but also dust-storms, cloud cover and even tornadoes. The latter of which is how we choose to translate 'sand-duct'.

Jokes at the expense of bad English aside, EIG looks to be welcome relief in an endless parade of sci-fi or fantasy RTS games, and perhaps the first really accessible game to capture the scope of World War II.

Anthony Fordham



WHY EUROPE IN GUNFIRE DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

■ It's not just another sci-fi realtime strategy game

■ A very wide range of historical units

■ Environmental effects add new element to strategy

■ Recreate famous battles; change the course of history

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MOD LIFE

Spotlight

NEWS FROM ALL QUARTERS OF THE GLOBE

RIP 3DFX

INVENTORS OF VOOODOO FALL FOUL OF BAD MOJO



Last month, we reported that 3dfx was in major trouble, and had quit the graphics board business in order to focus on chip development. Sadly, the situation for 3dfx has since dramatically worsened.

The King is dead

In an effort to protect its creditors and maximise shareholder value, 3dfx recently announced that it would sell most of the company's assets to nVidia, and dissolve the rest of the company after a bulk asset sell off. Under the terms of the agreement, nVidia will pay to 3dfx a total consideration of \$70 million in cash and 1 million shares of common stock. In return, nVidia will acquire the core graphics department of 3dfx. These graphics related assets include, but are not limited to, patents, pending patent applications, trademarks, brand names, and chip inventory related to the graphics business of 3dfx. In addition, 3dfx and nVidia have agreed to halt the patent infringement litigation between them.

The competition between the two companies has been fierce over the past few years, but has resulted in some revolutionary technology. What we have residing in our PC is a direct result of this constructive one-upmanship. Now that 3dfx has been swallowed by nVidia, the market is looking increasingly like a monopoly. Rendition has been acquired and dissolved; Matrox has moved into the business-only market; SonicBlue/S3 has been bought by Via and had its graphics sector shut-down; Intel's graphics interests have soured; and the BitBoys Oy has still failed to produce anything tangible.

This leaves the market to Videologic, ATi and nVidia. With the PowerVR 3 chipset failing to ignite much interest in the retail market, Videologic may terminate

LOOK TO THE FUTURE

3dfx founder and CEO Scott Sellers, believes the agreement is in the best interests of all involved. "We deeply regret these actions," he said. "Again, we want to extend our sincerest thanks to every one of you who helped 3dfx revolutionise 3D graphics and 3D gaming on the PC. Rest assured, the 3dfx legacy will live on through the combined strengths of these two great companies."

its graphics business. The Dreamcast and Naomi may have been their swan-song in the 3D graphics arena. ATi, however, looks increasingly like a real contender. The Radeon GPU has demonstrated ATi's technological know-how and an ability to deliver on schedule. The next-generation Radeon follow-up is nearing release. Having recently cemented a cross-licensing arrangement with Intel and secured a highly profitable OEM deal with Apple, ATi is in a great position to seize a considerable portion of the market.

Obviously, the combined forces of nVidia and 3dfx will remain the dominant players - nVidia's legendary efficiency and technological superiority is perfectly complemented by 3dfx's established Voodoo brand and Gigapixel's Mosaic technology.

Derek Perez, PR director at nVidia, recently commented, "3dfx has a strong portfolio with more than 40 patents... Many of these are fundamental patents of Gigapixel's work in tile-based rendering. Combined with nVidia's 33 granted patents and 55 more pending patents, we will own key technologies that form the cornerstone of the future of 3D graphics."

3dfx had a tremendous amount of world-class engineers, most of whom have joined nVidia.

Black Magic History

3dfx deserves a lot of credit for jump-starting the PC game graphics market. It was first to market with a really useful accelerator, the Voodoo Graphics. The Voodoo Graphics featured 4Mb of on-board memory, and had impressive features like bilinear filtering, alpha transparency and the ability to perform coloured lighting. 3dfx's dominance continued through the release of Quake 2, with the Voodoo2 and its impressive SLI configuration. The Voodoo2 defeated challenges from Permedia, ATi, S3, Matrox and upstart nVidia.

It is easy to chart the demise, right from the acquisition of STB systems and the abortive launch of the Voodoo 3. A lack of experience when dealing with the retail channel coupled with the high R&D costs of developing its own boards made it tough right from the start. Huge marketing outlays, the lack of OEM support and a diminishing profit margin in retail sales compounded these difficulties. The Voodoo 3 was its first in-house graphics board, and was widely criticised for failing to address the desires of the gaming public and major OEMs. It was a less attractive solution than nVidia's TNT2, which offered support for 32-bit colour, high-resolution textures and large memory configurations. It was also priced too high to appeal to manufacturers. After a series of disappointing quarters, and the release of poorly selling boards under the Voodoo name and a new foray into TV tuner products, 3dfx shrunk its markets. In recent months 3dfx products have all but disappeared from Australian shelves. The Voodoo5 was badly received, effectively crystallising 3dfx's downfall. For us, 3dfx will always be remembered as the company that took gaming from pixelated VGA into the world of magnificent 3D.



Munch will be a flagship XBOX title



Bill's Box Exposed

THE XBOX IS FINALLY UNVEILED IN REDMOND, SEATTLE

During his keynote address at the CES in Las Vegas, Bill Gates unveiled the final retail design of the XBOX to expectant media. "XBOX is the future of videogaming," said Gates. "With its breakthrough technology and incredible graphics capabilities, XBOX will set the standard in gaming for years to come. It enables game designers to create a whole new world of gameplaying experiences that captivate the imagination and competitive spirit of gamers like no other console."

To emphasise the power of the XBOX, Gates called on WWF champion 'The Rock' to help unveil the new machine. As the finale of his speech, Gates demonstrated two exclusive XBOX games, which featured realtime graphics on a level of Disney's Toy Story. Microsoft claims the demo unit presented only one-fifth of the power of the final version. Gates also announced the final XBOX specifications. The CPU remains a 733MHz Pentium III (it was originally a 600MHz Pentium III, but was upgraded last year) along with a 250MHz nVidia graphics processor and the nVidia MCP-X controller chip. Microsoft has downgraded the performance expectations of the nVidia chip somewhat, but according to the specs it is still rated at 125 million polygons per second.

Since the success Atari days, American consoles have failed to capture public support. Japanese companies like Sega, SNK,

Nintendo and Sony have dominated the worldwide console market. The last console to be launched by Americans was the 3DO. Released to much fanfare in 1995, the 3DO did not enjoy public support and was soon discontinued. The Apple Pippin was another abortive attempt by the Americans to take on the Japanese giants. Gates is keen that Microsoft diversify from a software-only approach, a direction which has recently led to a dramatic fall in market growth. For the XBOX to fail would be a huge blow to Microsoft's pride and industry credibility.

For Microsoft, the XBOX represents a clear opportunity to make a big splash in the console pool. Microsoft insists the XBOX is 'just a simple games machine', yet with the addition of broadband connectivity, an integrated hard drive and DVD playback, the console is looking increasingly like a Trojan Horse. With the PlayStation2 shipping without a modem or a hard drive, the XBOX is in an excellent position to dominate in the console market. It's an ambitious attempt, but the potential payoff is enormous. The ever-growing console market is already worth US\$10 billion, much more than the box office revenue of the entire movie industry. And consoles are definitely set for further growth, with the Gamecube and PlayStation2 fuelling the market.

It's clear that Microsoft has done its homework. It has an enormous marketing

budget, the specifications are impressive and the corporation has widespread third-party support. Japanese game developers are also supporting the XBOX, including Konami, Namco, Capcom and Square. As Microsoft is well aware, games, not hardware specifications, mean success. With this in mind, Microsoft has already signed up over 200 developers to produce titles for the XBOX. Electronic Arts, traditionally been closely partnered with Sony, is including the XBOX in its production schedule. Unlike the cumbersome internal design of the PlayStation2, the XBOX has been designed with developers in mind. Even John Carmack is on the XBOX technical advisory board. The machine is easy to develop for, featuring well documented and time-proven architecture. Most importantly, the XBOX packs 64Mb of unified RAM, compared with PS2's 32Mb of RAM, only 4Mb of which can be used for graphics. Unified RAM is especially important, as it allows developers to allocate RAM to different areas as they see fit. As a result, Microsoft claims it will have an impressive 15 titles ready at launch. Assuming the product can be launched on time with sufficient product on store shelves, all the signs point to the XBOX being an enormous success.



ALICE

Wes Craven, director of Nightmare on Elm Street, has signed on to direct Alice the movie. American McGee is said to be producing the film, and Natalie Portman has expressed interest in the lead. More details - and pictures - as they come to light.

Q3A MOH

The respected Medal of Honor franchise is receiving another treatment, with news of a Quake 3 powered squad-based tactical game. Handed by 2015 - developer of the SIN mission pack - Medal of Honor: Allied Assault will be set in World War II and will feature player control of a wide variety of military vehicles. Expect a MoH vs Commandos debate to begin soon.

Diablo II Deaths

GEEKS WORLDWIDE GO INTO MOURNING

Many Hardcore Diablo II players have lost items, skill points and in many cases their characters' lives in a successful hack on the Blizzard Battle.net servers.

Late last year hackers defeated security measures on a number of servers and used player characters in what the Sydney Morning Herald newspaper described as a "virtual massacre." Hackers played with the characters and exposed them to life-threatening situations, dumped all their

belongings and altered skill levels. The hackers killed many characters by taking them unprepared into dangerous areas of the game.

Following a huge outcry, Blizzard has reset the servers to their original state on December 19, when the hack first occurred. Hardcore players killed in the hack have had their skill points and items restored to December 19 levels automatically. Those players who believed they had lost items in the hack but had not been killed were able to flag their characters manually, and those characters were later also reset by Blizzard.

The hack has received international coverage in the mainstream media, and has resulted in a redesign of Battle.net security. The hack is most likened to a denial-of-service attack, in that many Diablo II players were unable to participate until their characters were restored.

Brings new meaning to the term 'hack and slash'

Save Project IGI

WILL DEVELOPER RELENT TO FANS' OUTCRY?

In a show of player solidarity, fans of Eidos' Project IGI have started a number of web-based petitions calling for an in-mission save feature to be included with in an upcoming patch for the game.

Martin Gram, lead programmer for the IGI, maintains the style of play the developers intended for the game does not allow for an in-mission save. However, fans are unconvinced, insisting publishing deadlines were responsible for the missing feature.

With thousands of players signing the petitions, Eidos will consider adding the feature, but Gram insists such a feature would destroy the atmosphere of tension and concentration required to play the game.

A Christmas 2000 deadline saw Project IGI rushed to the shelves, and the developers of the title were unable to complete the programming required for an in-mission save for the complex title. Fans remain unhappy.



WIN! SHEEP!

THEY'RE ALMOST AS CUTE AS SUSY

Ever wanted your own, personal herd of sheep but never had the time or money to manage a costly collective of woolly wanderers? Yes? Well then, here's your chance.

Thanks to EA, we are giving away ONE extra super Sheep pack! The pack contains - if you're the winner - a copy of Sheep the game, a Sheep wallet, a Sheep stuffed toy and a stylish, risque Sheep t-shirt emblazoned with the charming "Flock It" slogan. If you're one of the FOUR runners up you get the same thing, except minus the game itself. In order to win this prize pack, all you have to do is tell us in 25 words or less what you would do with a box full of toy sheep - and, please, keep it printable, people.

Send your entry to:
Sheep Comp @ PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St
Redfern NSW 2016



Server

THE LATEST INTERNET NEWS

TELSTRA, OPTUS TO PAY TAX ON CABLE

The Federal Court has upheld a lower court decision allowing 13 New South Wales and four Victorian local councils to send off annual council rate bills to Telstra and C&W Optus (CWO) for pay TV and Internet cables strung up in their respective areas.

The councils had originally billed the telcos, claiming that the cables occupied 'public space' and were thus subject to a rate levy. Though both Telstra and CWO are appealing the decision, if it stands local councils across Australia could benefit by up to \$15 million a year according to NSW Local Government Association president Peter Woods. A CWO Spokesperson said, "Companies that have invested in infrastructure and rolled out new networks have now been penalised - this is a huge disincentive for future investment."

AGL PURCHASES DINGOBLUE

It's no secret that CWO has been interested in selling off parts of its empire to the highest (or any) bidder, but the bidding and negotiation process has been slow so far. However, it has managed to sell off the 'cool' dial-up and mobile company dingoBlue, with energy company AGL taking 100% control for an equally cool \$22m.

Since its launch around 18 months ago, dingoBlue has developed a reputation as a

top quality Internet service provider. An integrated online payment system and relentless advertising campaign has brought in over 74000 customers and a healthy revenue base.

AGL says it will make no changes to the service that db supplies now, so existing users should not be worried by the development. Yet AGL has said it plans to integrate db's online billing and customer support mechanisms with its own gas and electricity bills.

OPTUS@HOME TURNS ON SXC

A few months ago both Optus and Telstra's Internet services were thrown into disarray when the main overseas link was cut somewhere around Singapore. Recently, the same thing happened again (to Optus' APCN link) and Optus sprang into action, utilising leased lines and satellite to continue to provide overseas service.

Realising that a fix might not come quickly, Optus decided to begin to use the much vaunted Southern Cross Cable (SXC) link ahead of time (allegedly 3 to 6 months earlier than planned). And so, for the first time ever, SXC was put into use for NSW and Victorian @Home users.

Though as yet nothing has been stated publicly by CWO or O@H, the SXC link will apparently remain in use and gradually increase in capacity for all Optus services.



ATi & Intel

TECH COMPANIES AGREE TO SETTLE THEIR DIFFERENCES

Intel Corp and ATi Technologies Inc recently announced that the two companies have reached an agreement on a broad cross-licensing deal. A major part of the agreement will result in the settlement of their differences over a patent infringement suit out-of-court. Intel originally inherited the litigation when it acquired Real3D, with whom ATi was then embroiled in a patent infringement suit.

In regard to the deal, Dave Orton, CEO of ATi, issued the following statement: "ATi and Intel are recognised technology and market leaders in their respective categories and their agreement will enable both companies to build upon those unique strengths," he said.

"For example, the agreement will permit ATi to build our technology leading Radeon graphics into chipset for Intel's microprocessors."

In terms of actual technology, the new cross-licensing deal will allow ATi to produce low cost chipsets for the Intel Pentium range. As such, it will likely see Intel incorporating elements of ATi's Radeon graphics technology. This could potentially make a huge difference for Intel, whose entry level i815e chipset supports only the most rudimentary 3D abilities.

The low-cost PC sector is booming, so the prospect of a high-performance, embedded 3D accelerator would be very appealing to Intel. ATi has been equally interested in this area, with its objective essentially to build a business serving low-end PC manufacturers and Net appliance manufacturers. The company plans to build a low-cost multi-function chip that merges North Bridge functionality with integrated audio and video.



Duke Closer to God

3D REALMS SWITCHES PUBLISHER

Gathering of Developers announced it has purchased the rights to publish the Duke Nukem games. While the news is not unexpected, since 3D Realms was one of the original GOD developers, industry observers hope this latest announcement will bring forward the release date of the perennially anticipated Duke Nukem Forever.

The latest acquisition gives GOD the right to publish all Duke branded products, include made-for-console titles such as the upcoming Land of the Babes. GOD will now also handle further publication of Duke3D and presumably the original platform games originally released as shareware by Apogee.



Duke Nukem Forever was first handled by GT, but continual delays and the purchase of GT by Infogrames, saw the publisher easily dislodged. Despite the new publisher and a new millennium, 3D Realms still insists Duke Nukem Forever will only be released "when it's ready".

WONDERS

Gathering of Developers will publish the sequel to the largely overlooked Age of Wonders. A worthy alternative of Heroes of Might and Magic, Age of Wonders 2 will use a "top of the line Direct3D graphics engine" according to developer Triumph Studios. Further details are not yet forthcoming.

Digital Disaster

LEGISLATIVE SANITY FOR DIGITAL TV - WHEREFORE ART THOU?

Governments, particularly the current Federal Government, haven't in the past shown an incredibly forward-thinking approach to matters of high technology. So it comes as no surprise that the policy for the introduction of Digital TV at the beginning of this year has come under criticism from many corners.

The latest body to offer an opinion is the Internet Industry Association (IIA), which has recently released a report entitled "Why Australia has been shortchanged on Digital TV". As the title suggests, the report is not very complimentary, with the concern being that Digital TV has been launched in Australia with a huge price tag but only marginal benefits.

Heavy restrictions

Digital TV has the capability to provide multi-channeling, datacasting, a significantly clearer picture, interactivity (including games), and a host of other emerging abilities. However, the model that the government is implementing severely limits many of these aspects and completely cuts out others. Multi-channeling, for instance, is heavily restricted and can only be used when, say, a live sportscast runs over time, or for 'educational purposes'. Further, digital broadcasting is similarly restricted to programs of less than ten minutes for TV

style shows, news bulletins, etc, so as not to threaten the existing free-to-air networks. Such as Nine. Which is owned by Kerry Packer. Who has strong influence in Canberra. Coincidence?

"The Internet to your living room" touts the advertisement, but in fact Internet access through datacasting is only allowed when it is not used to create 'interactive television'. Datacasting is not expected to commence until late in 2002 anyway.

High price

The IIA report, along with many other industry analysts, also criticises the hardware used for Digital TV. Australia will be using HDTV (High Definition Television). Although HDTV produces a clearer picture and Dolby sound, it also consumes a lot of bandwidth.

With other hardware, such as SDTV (Standard Definition Television, used in the US), this is bandwidth that could be utilised for a vast range of interactive and other 'value added' services. However, the quality of SDTV's picture is not quite as high as HDTV (though it's still widescreen, and much better than analog TV) and the sound produced is MPEG audio.

Price is also a significant factor, though new technology is always going to be



comparatively expensive. At present set-top boxes (for use with analog TVs) cost around \$700 and with analog TVs the picture and sound won't be much better anyway. Sony is set to release a set with a built-in decoder late in 2001 that is expected to retail for around \$5000, but early generation sets won't have access to many DTV features such as interactivity - for that you will have to upgrade later, at further cost.

Analog transmissions will continue until 2008, though, so there's no need to panic. In fact, by the time 2006 or so rolls around, hopefully some sense of sanity will have prevailed with what is permissible to broadcast. And the price should have dropped significantly by then, too. So, our advice is that until then don't touch Digital TV with a barge pole and feel free to laugh heartily at those who do.

HASBRO

In stark contrast to the Rowan deal, French monolith Infogrames has purchased Hasbro in a deal valued at more than \$US100m. With Rollercoaster Tycoon still one of the best selling games in America, Infogrames' investment has widely been regarded as a smart move. The acquisition will give Infogrames the rights to publish hundreds of titles, including the entire Atari classic range.



WIN! BLUE BYTE COMP! GET YOUR HANDS ON LITTLE BLOKES

Trying to convince non-gaming flatmates to lean towards your gamer-related decorative choices can be a nightmare. We may just have the solution for you. Behold the Bluebyte prize pack, courtesy of Ozisoft.

The pack not only contains a whole truckload of Settlers games including Settlers 2, 3 (plus add-on) and 4 but also a set of snazzy Settlers figurines! FIVE runners up will win a copy of Battle Isle: The Andosia War. All you have to do is tell us the names you would give to your four new Settlers friends.

Send your entry to:
I'll Settle For That @ PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St
Redfern NSW 2016



Confidential

PLEASE SIGN THE NDA FIRST

Intriguing news from Ritual this month, when Levelord came back from lunch to find his company had split up. Carrying an egg-salad sandwich and an inter-office memo about loitering around the water cooler, Levelord was surprised to discover valued Ritual members Ron and Mark had cleaned out their offices and scarpered to form Mumbo Jumbo. "All we know is that they were here one day then gone the next," said Levelord. He added that Ritual still owns SiN and that the empty offices have been put to good use. Sadly it was later revealed the entire episode was a joke. We knew it was too good to be true...



To Dallas now, and id has announced a remake of the classic Commander Keen. Before an enraptured crowd numbering in excess of 40000, id's Tom Hollenshead exhorted the mob to "look for more Commander Keen related news in the near future!" Forget Doom III, we want Keen!

Actually, don't forget Doom III, because Amercian McGee has "seen the light." Specifically, he has seen the lighting effects in id's hotly anticipated title. McGee said the lighting effects are "amazing." More information on Doom III, and McGee's mental state, as it comes to light. Hohoho...

a dark future...
an uncertain past...
no one left to trust.



ONI

The most anticipated
Game of 2007!



OFFICE OF FILM AND LITERATURE CLASSIFICATION



MATURE
(15 YEARS & OVER)
MEDIUM LEVEL
ANIMATED VIOLENCE



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MYTH 3

...or possibly Rumour 3 Myths. In any case, the third installment in the 3D olde worlde tactical combat Myth series has been announced. Details are very, very sketchy at this time, although we can expect a return of the Demolition Dwarves and loads and loads of blood soaking picturesque medieval landscapes.

XBOX LEGO

In a sign that Xbox will also cater for mainstream and family titles, LEGO has signed up to develop games for the Microsoft console. While a proposed product range has not been discussed, fans of PC LEGO can expect reiterations of Constructor, Rock Raider and many other bricklaying classics.

Viva Independence!

INDIE DEVELOPERS GET CHANCE TO SHINE



The GDC Independent Games Festival will be held March 20 - 24 in San Jose, California. Celebrating independent development, the festival provides an arena for new and established game companies to compete for the Seamus McNally prize, worth US\$10,000, in the areas of game design, technical excellent, visual art and audio.

Keynote speakers will address the festival, and will include Maxis Chief Designer Will Wright. Wright will discuss inspiration as it applies to game design, and

intends to cover such diverse subjects as architecture, toys, epidemiology and casinos.

Other speakers include Professor of Computer Science and Media Arts at the MIT, Marvin Minsky. Professor Minsky will discuss programs, emotions and common sense and how they apply to game design.

Ten games have been selected as finalists for this year's Indie Fest, and includes a title from ex-id artist Paul Steed's new place of employment, Wild Tangent. Its game, SabreWing, is a 3D space shooter than runs entirely in a web browser, and can be played immediately by anyone

willing to wait the download time at www.wildtangent.com

Space Time Foam has Chase Ace 2 selected, Nexon will showcase Shattered Galaxy, and Interadventure will also show off a self-titled game before the industry's leading designers and coders.

Unfortunately for gamers, the festival is trade-only, but fortunately in the coming months, the pages of PC PowerPlay will bring you in depth news and previews of all the games selected as finalists at this year's Indie Fest. If they're any good. The games, that is.



For further Conference and Festival news, visit www.gdconf.com today!



CALL TO POWER II COMP!

CONQUER THE WORLD FROM HOME

In a recent, completely imaginary poll, it was revealed that a good 50% of the PCPP readership consists wholly of power hungry despots intent on global domination. Keeping this fact in mind, we contacted our good friends at Activision and managed to secure THREE copies of the recent hit, Call To Power II, to give away to you megalomaniacal wannabe dictators.

If you want to win one, what you've gotta do is this: tell us, as briefly as possible, the first law you would enact as soon as you came to power as Global Dictator For Life. Make it funny, make it original and make it short and you could very well win your chance to live out your virtual, power mad fantasies. Hail to the King!

Send your entry to:

It's Your Majesty to you @ PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St
Redfern NSW 2016



Mod Life

SPOONMAN'S ROUNDUP OF ALL THE LATEST MOD NEWS

BID FOR POWER

For Quake 3: Arena
Developer Team BFP
URL www.bidforpower.com
Release Current Early Beta

Bid for Power is a Quake 3 Mod based on the Dragon Ball Z Universe and already looks quite promising. Those familiar with the particular characters associated with Dragon Ball Z will be pleased to learn many of them have been replicated faithfully in the mod. There have been quite a few enhancements made to the Q3 engine, including the ability to fly upside down, which sounds like a great idea. While this all sounds well and good Bid for Power may never eventuate due to an impending legal battle with Funimation, the makers of Dragon Ball Z as Infogrames recently purchased the series' licence. Time will tell what happens to this wonderful looking mod.



SVEN CO-OP

For Half-Life
Developer Sven
URL www.svencoop.com
Release Current v 1.9

Co-op mode is sorely missed in many FPS games these days. It's certainly the most difficult to get right in terms of balanced gameplay, so many developers seem to opt out of giving it a go. Luckily, there are mods like Sven co-op to help the situation. Including the ability to play the original Half-Life in co-op mode, SCO adds other variations such as Hunt the Garg and Stadium. Stadium is particularly fun, pitting a group of monsters against yourself, or against each other, or whatever takes your fancy. You have the ability to team monsters up, as well as enemy groups, and have 'friendlies'. The best part about Sven Co-op is not its remarkable feature set, but the amazing flexibility in what it provides. You couldn't ask for more in co-op mode.



FRONT LINE FORCE

For Half-Life
Developer Team FLF
URL www.frontlineforce.com
Release Current v1.2 (client and linux server)

Front Line force has been available for some time now, but we couldn't resist this opportunity to have our say on one of the more popular new mods on the scene. Many people will probably compare FLF with Counter-Strike, however if you look a little bit deeper you'll notice the similarities end and the new innovations take hold. Like Counter-Strike (CS), FLF is a team based game with one team attacking and the other defending, at the completion of a round the teams swap over. The main concept of FLF revolves around certain 'capture points' scattered around the map. As you've probably guessed, the attacking team has to take the capture points while the defenders have to stop them. The main catch is however, that once a capture point is taken it's taken for good. The game can only finish when either the time runs out or the attackers take all of the capture points. To me this makes FLF much more strategic than CS. The weaponry is much the same style as CS, but there are three different player classes you can use and money isn't an issue. A refreshing change.



SPOONMAN'S LAN DIARY

Welcome to a special Sunshine State Edition of Spoonman's LAN Diary, as usual send your LAN details to spoonman@next.com.au for your slice of fame and glory.

LANS R US

Location Townsville QLD
Date Monthly (last week of month)
Players 40
Price \$20
URL www.lansrus.net

LANS R US run a two Day LAN every month in Townsville. As an added bonus it is now also home to the Townsville Professional Gaming Ladder, which can only be a good thing. Something extra I noticed about LANS R US is their commitment to less popular games by having "RPG Nite" and "RTS Nite" which is an excellent concept.

MAD GAMERS (MACKAY AND DISTRICT)

Location Mackay QLD
Date 26/1/00 - 27/1/00
Players up to 50
Price \$10 per day
URL www.mad-gamers.com

Unlike most two day LANs which run overnight, MAD gamers LAN is actually two full days of Gaming. That is certainly not something to scoff at for \$20, especially since you get a scrumious cooked breakfast for no extra charge. The competition seems pretty hot with a team most likely travelling from Rockhampton to try and arrest the Quake 3 Arena crown. As MAD Gamers say, "MADness is virtue", and I wholeheartedly agree.

COAST LAN

Location Sunshine Coast QLD
Date Monthly (1 day)
Players up to 40
Price \$10
URL www.coastlan.com

Coast LAN is a nifty little LAN 35 minutes north of Brisbane under the shade of the big pineapple,... ok maybe not, but it is a great priced LAN with some good things going for it. Firstly your \$10 gets you in as well as scores you a pizza which can't be bad value in anyone's language. Secondly you get to play games all day with 40 other people. Drinks are also only \$1 for when that LAN thirst gets you down.

For submissions, email spoonman@next.com.au



Coming soon

FEBRUARY 2001

Age of Sail 2 (Jack of all Games)
 Clive Barker's Undying (Electronic Arts)
 Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars (Jack of all Games)
 Fallout Tactics (Interplay)
 Heist (Ozisoft)
 NASCAR Racing 4 (Jack of all Games)
 Oni (Jack of all Games)
 Settlers 4 (Ozisoft)
 SimCoaster (Electronic Arts)
 Star Trek: Away Team (Activision)

MARCH 2001

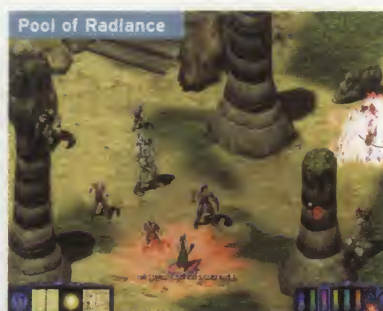
Black & White (Electronic Arts)
 Commandos 2 (Ozisoft)
 Desperados (Ozisoft)
 Evil Dead (THQ)
 Legends of Might & Magic (Jack of all Games)
 Myst 3 (Mattel)
 Pool of Radiance (Mattel)
 Project Eden (Ozisoft)
 Silent Hunter II (Mattel)
 Startopia (Ozisoft)
 Tribes 2 (Jack of all Games)

APRIL 2001

Anachronox (Ozisoft)
 Arcanum (Jack of all Games)
 Conflict Zone (Ubisoft)
 Dragon Riders (Ubisoft)
 Harpoon 4 (Mattel)
 I-War 2 (Ozisoft)
 Mafia (Jack of all Games)
 Return to Castle Wolfenstein (Activision)
 Summoner (THQ)

MAY 2001

Alone in the Dark (Ozisoft)
 Destroyer Command (Mattel)
 Evil Twin (Ubisoft)
 MechCommander 2 (Microsoft)
 Severance (Ozisoft)
 Tropico (Jack of all Games)



Australia's most wanted

No new entries. That's the theme this month. Every game from February's Top 10 is once again present and correct in March. Albeit most of them have jumped around a little bit. Black & White maintains its inexorable grip on the heart's of the nation (and New Zealand), featuring in more than half of your top fives, typically in the top spot. Just below, Gray Matter and Volition continue to vie for the mantle of firstperson shooter of the year - our money's on the latter to be the superior game at this stage. Perhaps the only real surprise is the poor performance of perennial Most Wanted contenders, Warcraft 3 and Duke Nukem Forever, slipping to the bottom of the chart. Seems more than a few of you just aren't content to wait forever, no matter how good the game appears to be.



This month's winner, **Michelle Ward** of **Auckland, New Zealand**, has got her wish of a copy of Neverwinter Nights. Send your Top Five most wanted games to: wanted@pcpowerplay.com.au

1	BLACK & WHITE	◀
2	Return to Castle Wolfenstein	◀
3	Red Faction	◀
4	Emperor: Battle for Dune	◀
5	Commandos 2	◀
6	Tribes 2	◀
7	Neverwinter Nights	◀
8	Halo	◀
9	Warcraft 3	◀
10	Duke Nukem Forever	◀

Hall of fame

PCPP'S MOST RECENT GOLD AWARDED GAMES - BUY THEM ALL!

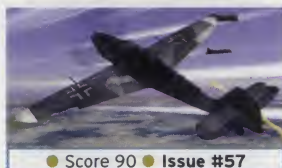


Mechwarrior 4 Vengeance

Microsoft

After the disappointing third in the series, FASA Interactive has resurrected the mech sim with this fourth effort. Hardly original, but polished to perfection.

Score 91 Issue #57

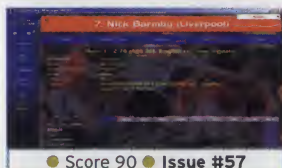


B-17 2

Hasbro

Despite the 11th hour loss of multiplayer, The Mighty Eighth offers such a compelling and varied singleplayer game that the option isn't even missed. Well, almost...

Score 90 Issue #57

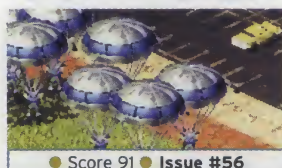


Championship Manager 00/01

Ozisoft

While admittedly of only niche appeal, this football management series is the pinnacle of the genre. And CM00/01 is definitely the best yet.

Score 90 Issue #57

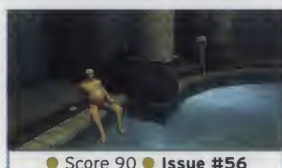


Red Alert 2

Electronic Arts

Westwood learned the lessons from Tiberian Sun, buffing and polishing the Red Alert sequel into perhaps the finest realtime strategy without polygons.

Score 91 Issue #56



Hitman Codename 47

Ozisoft

With awesome physics, excellent AI and the best-dressed game character in recent memory, Hitman couldn't fail. And it sure as hell didn't.

Score 90 Issue #56

Our most wanted



David: Look at that shot and tell me you're not excited



Hugh: I'm getting X-Com flashbacks already



March: I'm still intrigued



Anthony: Want it? Nah, I just like the stupid name

Games Chart

THE BEST SELLERS THIS MONTH

inform

The Official Australian
PC Games Chart

Compiled by Inform in association with AVSDA

November 2000

Top 20 Best Selling Full Price PC Games

(>\$29.95 inc. GST)

Position	Game Title	Game Type
1	Cmd. & Cnqr. Red Alert 2	Strategy
2	Cmd. & Cnqr. Red Alert 2 Ptm	Strategy
3	Barbie Detective	Adventure
4	The Sims	Strategy
5	Baldur's Gate 2	RPG
6	Age Of Empires 2	Strategy
7	Sim Mania Pack	Strategy
8	Escape From Monkey Island 4	Adventure
9	Diablo 2	RPG
10	Flight Sim 2000	Simulation
11	Combat Flight Sim 2.0	Simulation
12	Tonka Dig N Rig	Edutainment
13	Stuart Little: City Adventures	Family
14	Sim Mania For Kids	Strategy
15	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2	Sports
16	Shogun: Total War	Strategy
17	Cmd. & Cnqr. Tiberian Sun	Strategy
18	Sydney 2000	Sports
19	Grand Prix 3	Racing
20	FIFA 2001	Sports

A V S D A
Australian Visual Software Distributors Association Ltd

• New entry
• Non mover
• Up from last month
• Down from last month

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Harvey Norman

PC PowerPlay

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Harvey Norman franchisees would like to offer readers of PC PowerPlay an exclusive discount offer on the titles appearing on the Official Australian PC Games Chart. Simply complete the coupon and take it into any Harvey Norman franchise store to claim your discount.

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State: _____ Post Code: _____
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Email: _____
Local Harvey Norman store: _____

☐ I would like to receive news & other special offers

HP5



INBOX

PLATINUM PG

The **LETTER OF THE MONTH** writer wins a game from Ozisoft's Platinum range of titles. Available in Platinum this month are Deathtrap Dungeon, Tomb Raider, Outcast, Imperium Galactica 2, TA: Kingdoms, Wheel of Time, and Le Mans 24 Hours.

Letters Topic: What do you think of Starsiege Tribes, eh?

Write to: PC PowerPlay Letters, 78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016 Email: letters@pcpowerplay.com.au



Half-Life: now you don't need to own it to play Counter-Strike

THE NET SUCK

I was reading PCPP#55 and came across the Counter-Strike review. I've had Half-Life for awhile now and I've never been able to play online. Whenever I try I'm greeted by the Half-Life auto updater. Then I wait seven hours on a 56k modem connection only for the "update" to be faulty. Every patch I can find still doesn't work. I've played Counter-Strike LAN and it was alright but we hardly ever made contact and the bots off the net suck. So, if I buy the Counter-Strike box set will I have to wait hours for an update or will the boxed game be different to the Half-Life mod?

Stephen Henry

In short, the retail version will be fine. You will not need to download heaps of patches and updates.

BYTE SIZE

What really annoys me is that you hardly ever have any articles on any C & C games such as Red Alert 2, Tiberian Sun and other war strategy games. Please do something about it.

Rodney N

Like putting Red Alert 2 on the cover of PCPP#56, for instance? And then featuring it in Retroversion this month?

However, it does strike as odd how even the patches you've found (presumably from our coverdiscs) have failed as well...

94% AT LEAST

I was wondering why you, David, let March review Baldur's Gate II and he only gave it 93%! I would have given it 94% at least, and 96% at the most. Have you even played BG2? You have probably been too busy with Torment. I've played Torment and it's nothing compared to BG2. Why did you drop out of RPG side?

INteRcePtoR

It was like this, you see: When BG2 arrived in the office, there was great enthusiasm from all quarters to review it. Indeed, I grabbed it first, after hiding in shadows and stealing from under Brett's watchful eye. But then March cunningly cast a Charm spell and ordered that it be handed over immediately. Not even a brave pickpocket attempt could retrieve it as he teleported out of the building.

But seriously, as I would have stated in my review, Torment remains the superior game. The depth of its storyline, characters and interaction, in addition to the unique setting, put Torment in a class of its own. It's the second best game ever, remember?

APPEAL TO A WIDE

As I read through the latest PC PowerPlay, I began to notice an undeniable trend towards 'commercialism' rather than content emerging in the structure of the magazine. Rather than providing the depth and entertainment that you deem to be such important qualities within games, it would seem that PCPP is beginning to adopt a much more simplistic structure by omitting the content and replacing it with "diversions". I realise that in order to become a productive magazine, it is required that you appeal to a wide demographic. However, you should not alienate your loyal fans. Isn't it funny how you criticise games for their shallowness, yet fail to realise that in order for them to be productive, they too must appeal to a diverse range of people? Isn't it hypocritical that you should criticise games for 'commercialism', yet fail to realise that you too are beginning to be perpetrators of this problem?

Neil Sainsbury

This is a concern. Not because you are correct, but because we don't know what you are talking about. In this issue, as has been the case for the past six months, there are two pages of Diversions, leaving over 100 pages for the rest of the magazine. Are we missing something?

WORK AS A MOVIE

After an intense game session, a thought suddenly struck me. How many games out there are possibilities for a damn good conversion to a blockbuster movie. While I am aware that the new Tomb Raider movie looks promising, game to movie conversions have had a bad run. There are some games out there that would not work as a movie, but it would be interesting to see what the outcome would be if a game like Deus Ex was put in the hands of Steven Spielberg.

Dark Angel

How about System Shock 2 in the hands of, say, David Fincher? Or Escape from Monkey Island done by the Coen brothers? Any other suggestions?

BYTE SIZE

Are you guys putting the CDs in a lot more securely or is it just me being a wimp? I almost snapped it trying to get it out.

SCoRpiON

Twist the disc as you pull. It works for us.

FOREIGN BASED COMPANY

After playing the Combat Mission demo and reading the review I have to say that I was very impressed with the game and how it was implemented.

However I was very disappointed to see that it can only be purchased over the Internet. I personally do not have the confidence to purchase items over the Internet. Especially if it's a foreign based company. At least the local software shop can exchange it easily if there is a problem.

Another turn off is the Australian dollar at the moment, which makes it more expensive than the local shop anyway. So for the time being I will have let what truly is a great game go for now and hope that the developers will not do this again in the future.

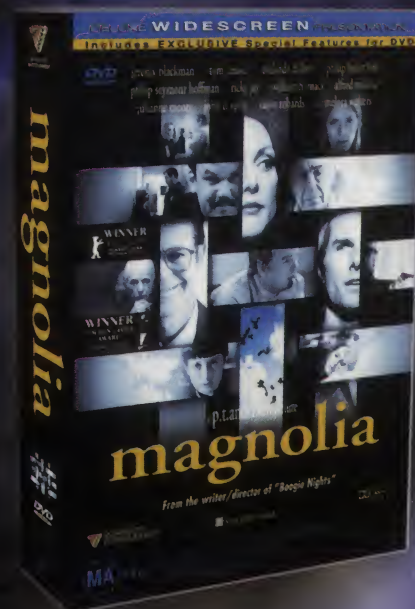
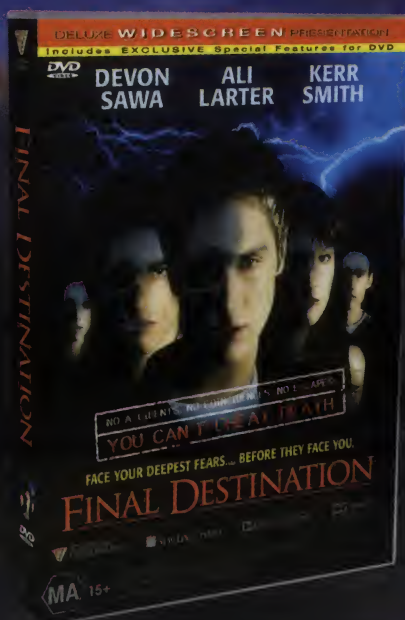
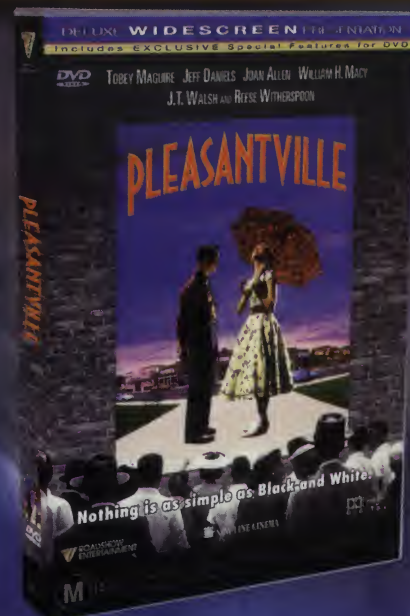
Dave

The sad fact is that if everyone else acts the same way, then Big Time Software might never get the chance to do it again in the future.

RATE IT HIGHER

Well, I am so disappointed with your reviews now that I have no choice but to not renew my subscription that is due next month. 91% for Red Alert 2 is nothing short of a joke. I can't believe that you rate it higher than Dark Reign 2 and Earth 2150. And slick graphics? I don't think so!

OWN IT ON

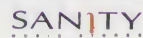


Available at



DAVID JONES

Harvey Norman



Then to really insult our intelligence you rate it lower than the most disappointing game in history, Tiberian Sun. On news groups and forums they are voting the most disappointing game of all time. It appears to be a toss up between Red Alert 2 and Tiberian Sun both of which you rated highly.

Like I said I am really disappointed. You have lost credibility and I will no longer be buying your magazine. I will get my reviews from alternative, more consistent and more objective sources.

Bolero

Well, ratings are funny things. While we of course try to ensure there is consistency with how similar games have been rated in the past, the fact that different people work on and write for the magazine at different times means it isn't always easy. Simply, no current member of the PCPP team thought Tiberian Sun worthy of 94%. However, we do think Red Alert 2 is a 91% game. And, yes, it's much, much better than Tiberian Sun. In fact, we might even say "it's the game Tiberian Sun should have been."

FEATURED A LETTER

I need some answers to the following questions please.

1. Have you ever played System Shock 2 for more than 3 minutes without screaming and throwing the computer out the window?
2. Do you ever get frustrated with the constant updates and new releases of games, computer software etc.
3. How many times have you played Deus Ex?
4. Why is the Oracle no longer in your mag? Did he die of old age?
5. Why does Diablo 2 costs \$99.95?
6. And finally, in one of the issues of PCPP there featured a letter asking why Half-Life did not score a 100%.

BYTE SIZE

Do the reviewers write the captions or is there just some funny little monkey man that does it?

Monkey Boy

Wrong. Captions are usually done by the in-house staff working all night in a semi-lucid state the day before deadline. We find inspiration easier then. The little monkey man doesn't participate in captioning, but often makes up reader's letters.

You guys said something like "No game can ever be perfect so therefore it cannot be given 100%." And now why is it when I look at the score list just before the reviews, I see a 100% next to Wolfenstein 3D?

The mental lunitic

BYTE SIZE

Lucky Money club, Hong Kong, in Deus Ex. Mercedes and Tessa: two worst Australian accents ever?

SoCk_PuPpEt

Yes and no. Mercedes was simply confused with an English accent. But Tessa? Ugh. We'll give you that one.

1. Well that would be silly
2. If you mean sequels, then yes.
3. We're always playing Deus Ex.
4. That's a question only the Great, Bearded One Himself could answer accurately.
5. Sierra can get away with it.
6. Firstly, the Score List hasn't been in front of the reviews nor has it featured Wolfenstein since PCPP#46. Where have you been? Secondly, the re-release of Wolf3D earned an old-school 10/10, which (rather annoyingly) translates to 100%. Rest assured, no future game will ever gain 100%. Probably.

ALLOWED TO VOTE

I need to say that Game of the Year is getting worse every year! There used to be all kinds of cool categories such as the worst game of the year, then the next year you took them all out, and now there are no categories! Not even best game of each genre! You haven't even given us a list of games that we are allowed to vote for! This is horrible!

Anonymous

Please spare a thought for the poor sod who had to tally all the votes in all those millions of categories we foolishly decided to include in previous GOTYs. The new streamlined GOTY will not only be easier to collate, but will provide you guys with the Readers Top 100 you've all been requesting. Trust us, it's better.

Oh, and we did give you a list - it's called the Score List and, as the above Mental Lunitic should now be able to inform you, it's found after the reviews.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

INDUSTRY PHRASES

The editorial in the December issue got me thinking. I agree that games criticism has a problem with hyperbole and exaggeration. But, I'm not sure that the nature of the industry (in "an infancy"?) is the reason for it; I think poor writing is at least partly to blame.

Games criticism isn't well known for quality writing. There are lots of games critics, writing professionally and as amateurs, who make basic mistakes with grammar, spelling and style. It's true the demographic largely doesn't care about most of these issues - but that doesn't mean professional writers shouldn't strive to get them right. On a basic level, fussy people like me will be satisfied, and the ones who don't care won't notice.

However, the more important point to make is that better quality writing will help to ensure that critics will be telling readers what they mean, rather than rehashing industry stock phrases that may or may not be applicable and that are so overused that they mean nothing. Don't tell us a game is 'revolutionary' - tell us what it does and let us decide for ourselves.

PC PowerPlay is certainly not the worst culprit. I admire your industry knowledge and your ability to get interviews with key players, but if you claim to be journalists (as you have done), you should be attempting to write clearly and without making simple errors.

David Thornby

You're right. Thanks to the unfettered proliferation of games websites masquerading as journalism, the quality of games criticism is generally appalling.

Given the tight deadline constraints within which we work, it's inevitable errors will make it into print. Though I'm sure you'll agree that PCPP is better than most and has certainly improved its literary standards over the years. We're trying, at least!

Of all the correspondence we've ever received from readers, yours is perhaps the most heartening. It's nice to know that someone, somewhere, actually gives a damn. Do you want a job?

ESSENTIALLY THE SAME KIT

I read your review of Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force, and it is the most pathetic, biased review I have ever read. Some people actually DO like Star Trek.

At the top of the review, under the title was the words: "Captain's Log: Yes, ok, it's another Star Trek game..." what's up with that? Are you implying that ALL Star Trek games are bad? You seem to love Star Wars and hate Star Trek, but forget about dismal attempts at "games" like Force Commander?

The occasional Star Trek joke is fine, but when EVERY game you review insults, and makes fun of Star Trek it just clouds your reviews with irrelevant rubbish. You spent more time getting smart to Star Trek and less reviewing the game. Then you say about the weapons: "Boring weapons" and "...and have come up with a few new, but sadly unimaginative, models." It's bad enough saying that (I have never seen a photon torpedo launcher in any other FPS game), but then you say "essentially the same kit you had when playing through the first Quake!"

What? So Q2, Q3, Unreal, UT and nearly every other FPS game isn't guilty of this? Even Doom had a shotgun, rocket launcher, chaingun. You cannot criticise one game for having the "same" weapons as Quake, and not criticise the others. Q3's review made no mention of how we'd seen those weapons before, and that somehow this was bad.

The bad guys AI is exactly as you would expect it to be in a Star Trek game. Have you ever watched a Star Trek movie with the Borg in it? They lumber in until you kill them all, exactly as in the game. Please review future Star Trek games without your bias against Star Trek.

Scott Graham

George Soropos, the writer of the review in question, is fluent in eight dialects of Klingon and has saved Deep Space Nine from Cardassian attack on no less than three separate occasions. He is eminently qualified to review a Star Trek game and poke a little fun at its more insecure fans. Lighten up, Star Trek is not meant to be taken too seriously.

You took
their flag.

Now they're
coming to
bury you
with it.

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THE BEST OF 2000

WHILE WE COUNT YOUR VOTES FOR THE GAME OF THE YEAR AWARDS, WE THOUGHT WE'D SHARE WITH YOU OUR SELECTION OF THE BEST 2000 HAD TO OFFER...

OVERALL GAME

1) Deus Ex

Incredible, complex, immersive and, most of all, freedom: these are words heard most often in conversations around the office and these conversations are almost certainly always about Deus Ex. How did you get into building A? How did you take out guard B? These are the types of questions that Deus Ex let you answer and, for the first time, allowed gamers to feel almost completely free in their gaming environment. Ion Storm's masterpiece not only met our standards as to what to expect from a game, it completely blew them away and re-defined them.



2) Planescape: Torment

This is as close as gaming has come to philosophy. Torment boasted the best ever plot in a roleplaying game, one that's filled with some of the most intricately developed and well-rounded characters we've ever encountered in a game. Or elsewhere, for that matter.

3) Counter-Strike

A revolution in online gaming, Counter-Strike was so much more than a mere Half-Life mod. Instead, it offered a completely original and thoroughly entertaining take on an old formula. Almost conclusive proof that a good game doesn't need a singleplayer mode.

4) The Sims

One of the most hotly anticipated games of the year didn't disappoint. The Sims taught us that teaching grown men and women how to use a toilet can be fun. Innovative and thoroughly addictive, The Sims was a gaming opus par excellence.

5) Shogun: Total War

Realtime strategy with an Oriental edge, Shogun: Total War was more a harsh lesson in the reality of war than ever a game. If a player was rash, unthinking or simply stupid, Shogun would punish him or her - and how. Shogun: Total War is definitely a strategist's delight.



GRAPHICS

1) Giants: Citizen Kabuto

From the innate, fragile beauty of the Sea Reaper clan to the rugged loftiness of the Kabuto, Giants was a game worth stopping for. The sheer tranquil splendour of the island alone made us want to frame our screens.

2) Sacrifice

Shiny's masterpiece certainly outshone most the competition in the eye-candy department. Winner of the PCPP best sky ever award.

3) Alice

A twisted take on an already perverted premise, American McGee's Alice took the Quake 3 engine and made it (much more) evil.



SOUND

1) Thief II: The Metal Age

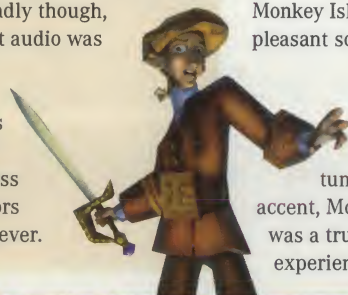
Crisp, tense and atmospheric, Thief II's sound served to complement the cobblestone world of Garret perfectly. Sadly though, this brilliant audio was not nearly as clear as the ominous sound of Looking Glass Studios' doors shutting forever. Oh, Alas.

2) Escape From Monkey Island

Three words: Good Voice Acting. With the weedy, likeable drawl of Guybrush taking the spotlight, Monkey Island was certainly a pleasant sound surprise.

3) No One Lives Forever

Replete with groovy tunes and a sultry Scottish accent, Monolith's kitsch shooter was a truly hip sound experience... daddy-o.



INNOVATION

1) The Sims

Like Days of Our Life on acid, Maxis managed to take a cultural obsession with reality entertainment and turn it into a superbly crafted and absolutely, unquestionably addictive gaming gem. The only game where you can escape reality... to live reality.

2) Combat Mission

A general's dream, Combat Mission is home to an incredibly intuitive, inventive and easily manageable battle system that is second to none.

3) Deus Ex

What more can be said about the best game in the history of all games? There is basically no other Deus Ex.



MULTIPLAYER

1) Counter-Strike

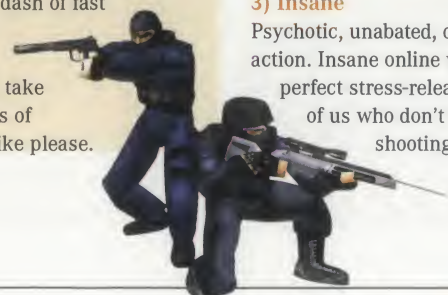
To put it simply, there is nothing on the market that even comes close to the multiplayer brilliance of this game. A dollop of tactical treat with a dash of fast paced fragging? Yes, we will take one big glass of Counter-Strike please.

2) Allegiance

Space based online action at The Zone, Allegiance gave us all the chance to be Han Solo at least once a night.

3) Insane

Psychotic, unabated, online racing action. Insane online was the perfect stress-release for those of us who don't really like shooting stuff.



Sim Coaster

THE THEME PARK SERIES TICKS OVER INTO A NEW YEAR. BUT HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?



DETAILS

GENRE

Management

MULTIPLAYER

No

DEVELOPER

Bullfrog

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE

February

URL

www.simcoaster.com

Taking everyone by surprise, the next edition of Bullfrog's Theme Park series has suddenly appeared on EA's release schedule - and it will apparently be out in only a couple of weeks. Besides the predictable addition of an assortment of new rides, the major new feature seems to be the inclusion of a narrative. The main objective to work your way to the top of the Theme Park business is set to provide some semblance of story progression to the otherwise free-form gameplay. The enjoyable option to experience the park from a firstperson view has wisely been retained.



(below) The firstperson view lets you wander around the park



Planetside

VERANT'S EXCURSION INTO THE WORLD OF ONLINE ACTION LOOKS EERILY FAMILIAR...

DETAILS

GENRE

Action

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Verant

PUBLISHER

Sony

AVAILABLE

4th Qtr

URL

www.verant.com

Comparisons to Halo cannot be overlooked when discussing Planetside. This new online action title from Everquest creator Verant bears many similarities - from concept to aesthetics - to Bungie's Xbox bound title, as these new screenshots illustrate to good effect. Set in a persistent world, players can create a character and development them over time, advancing through levels or ranks like in an RPG. Numerous vehicles can be commandeered, while a raft of high-tech weapons betrays the dominant mode of interaction in this teamplay shooter.



Roleplaying elements make an appearance



These work-in-progress shots illustrate the potential of the engine



With a giant ring in the sky, it'd be Halo

Throne of Darkness

ROLEPLAYING ACTION INSPIRED BY DIABLO AND CREATED BY SEVERAL FORMER BLIZZARD TYPES? DANIEL STAINES RECKONS IT'S A GOOD THING...



Our heroes' dancing routine was the hit of the party



With its sturdy two wheel base, the rickshaw proved an impregnable defence mechanism



DETAILS

GENRE
Roleplaying

MULTIPLAYER
Yes

DEVELOPER
Click Entertainment

PUBLISHER
Sierra Studios

AVAILABLE
2nd Qtr

URL
www.clickent.com

Sometimes things get, well... a little out of control here at PCPP.

When you get a bunch of highly opinionated, caustic gaming types and shove them in a building together for long periods of time certain... 'altercations' sometimes occur.

For instance, when Agata threatened to punch Christian's "goddamn sarcastic head in" and Brett was busy throwing Anthony's PC out the window for deriding Counter-Strike, that was pretty bad. Or when I sent in a screenshot of a menu for a review and David rang me at 3 in the morning screaming that he'd "mess me up" if I ever did it again, that was pretty bad too.

But you know what? No other game, insult or instance of violence in history has managed to simultaneously inflame and enrage us more than Blizzard's recent hack 'n slash masterpiece, Diablo II. Yes, that's right, you heard me, masterpiece. Anyways, we very nearly came to potentially fatal blows over this one: is it an action RPG experience without equal or is it just tedious point and click crud? Our opinions and those of gamers in general differ sharply on this and, for what it's worth, it looks like the war might start all over again with the release of the feudally flavoured Throne Of Darkness.

Dungeoneering

Being developed by (the appropriately titled) Click Entertainment, a San Francisco based studio founded by various former Blizzard employees and Diablo veterans, Throne of Darkness can be best described as Diablo with a squad-based, Japanese twist. Instead of controlling just the one character and tramping through gothic dungeon after gothic dungeon, players in Throne shall have control of up to eight samurai characters on screen at once. This should make for a fast-paced action romp through some very colourful and highly animated scenarios. Being able to control a ninja-warrior whilst simultaneously casting a wizard's thunderbolt adds an interesting element to the standard click 'n'

click formula made famous by Diablo.

Whether or not this will be enough to win over opponents of the genre remains to be seen.

Unfortunately, the press demo we received for play was very buggy, so it would be unfair to make any premature judgements about the game as yet. However, from what we've seen it looks to be a highly entertaining and defiantly action-oriented hack 'n slasher that will appeal to fans of the genre and may win over some converts with its unique tactical squad-based elements.

At any rate, I'll have to leave it there as I must rush off to purchase myself a new baseball bat in anticipation of the coming hostilities at the office.

Let the battle begin!



DETAILS

GENRE
Firstperson Shooter

MULTIPLAYER
Yes (1-32)

DEVELOPER
Volition

PUBLISHER
THQ

AVAILABLE
2nd Qtr

URL
www.redfaction.com

Red Faction

WILL VOLITION REVOLUTIONISE THE FPS?
MIKE WILCOX GIVES US AN UPDATE...

With the burst of a brisk Melbourne morning breeze, I recently blew into the head office of THQ Asia Pacific - or, in gaming vernacular, the local lodging of all things relating to Red Faction. Once there, I threatened to water pistol whip the first person who tried to stop me carrying out a full inspection of the latest developments in Volition's revolutionary new action game. Having made my intentions clear, I was calmly offered a cold drink and lead into a darkened boardroom for my preview. I guess they must get my type in there all the time.

Plant, I witnessed a stream of lava flowing from the roof of a room. By opening up a hole in the side of a duct with a rocket launcher, the path of the lava changed instantly, just as it would in the real world (*Of course it would - Ed*).

The way you can blast sections of objects apart is also a key feature. In another room I blew first the bottom, then the top out of floor to ceiling columns, only to see the remainder fall accurately to the ground. Further weapon testing saw walls being demolished, holes in floors created, even stalactites being used as falling weapons.

A giant wall fan in the next room revealed how the path of an object can be altered in mid-air by switching the fan on and off. I threw a satchel charge into the flow of air, only to see the weapon change course and detonate in a new location.

Glass physics

By far the most impressive weapon demo on an environment occurred in an area called the glass house. This room offered the chance to experiment with various weapons and their effects on glass, which were stunning to say the least. A single pistol shot could be fired in one side, only to come straight out the other, barely piercing the glass. But a rifle easily took out a small section of a single pane of glass,

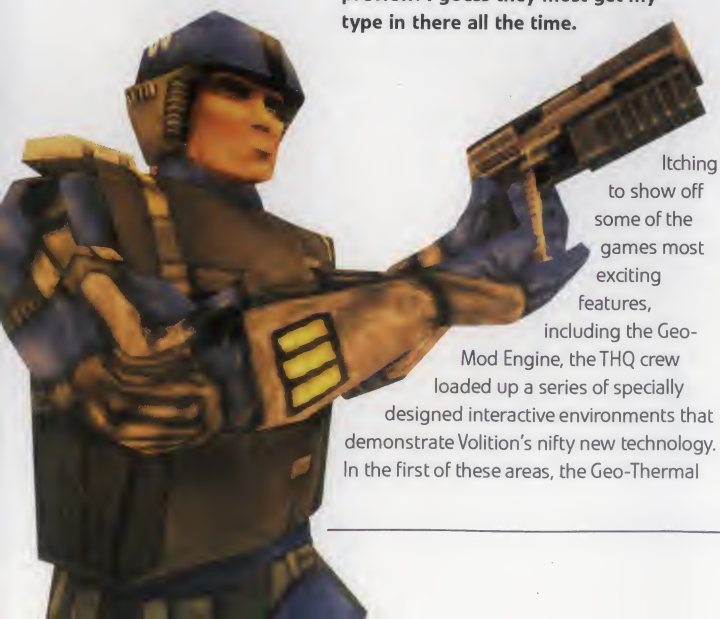
Let's pray these guns come in another colour in the final game. Green? Ugh...



shattering naturally to the ground, with the bullet lodging in the wall on the other side. And the rocket launcher was capable of destroying several panes of glass, as well as blasting a decent hole in the opposite wall.

In a convincing test of the physics engine, it didn't matter what ammo I fired into the sky, it all fell back to earth. Firing over a long distance requires compensation in aiming as the bullets begin to drop after too long. Other areas of the demo offered the chance to man three of the six vehicles available: an APC, a submarine, and an aircraft. Each will be targeted for special mission objectives, and also feature unique HUDs and weapons.

It's worth noting at this stage that none of the final game was available. Missing from the demo was the element of a storyline and missions, not to mention the support for up to 32 other players. Nonetheless, it's becoming clear that Red Faction is guaranteed to turn the firstperson shooter on its head when it see release in April.





State of Play

Military Sims

AWARDED NEARLY AS MANY MEDALS OF HONOUR AS HE HAS EATEN KIPPERS FOR BREAKFAST, OF COURSE MAJOR DES MCNICHOLAS WAS THE ONLY MAN RECRUITED FOR THIS MISSION...

Military simulations have long been a mainstay of the computer gaming world, consistently ranking in the top games of any given year, and at least matching firstperson shooters in the drive for improved graphics, speed, sound and peripherals. Nine made it into PCPP's Top 100 in September (my own selection would double that number!), and the level of long-term online community interest is probably unmatched by any other genre. Add a host of derivative games, such as *Crimson Skies*, and part FPS/part simulation classics such as *Rogue Spear*, and the influence of military simulations is clear for all to see. (The sermon is over, you may all rise!).

For those who can't quite recall the excitement generated by *Strike Commander* in the early 90s, a quick glance through some back issues of PCPP traces the evolution of military simulations over the last few years. It has been (and still is) an evolution driven largely by technology, although some recent releases suggest that gameplay is gaining ascendancy over processor speed. Remember the arcade action of *Top Gun*: Fire at Will, from our very first issue? Or the raw atmosphere of classics such as *Silent Service* and *Aces of the Deep*? More recently, *Falcon 4* and *Panzer Elite* set



MILITARY SIMS

The line that defines a military simulation has blurred. It's no longer just a matter of driving your personal plane, tank or submarine, as most sims now incorporate group tactics and strategic elements, with the ability to jump between each at will. That said, a military simulation can probably be defined as any game in which the key element is the operation of a military platform in a realistic environment. And therein lies the attraction of military sims - they offer fantasy grounded in reality. Players can actually fly in the *Battle of Britain*, stalk Russian missile boats under ice packs during the Cold War, or do their bit for the ground war in the Gulf.

new standards of graphics and realism, while Jane's F/A 18 and *Mig Alley* proved that you can have it all - atmosphere, gameplay and realism.

Preferential treatment

Getting the balance right between those three elements is the key to a great military simulation, but it's an extremely difficult task. Put too much emphasis on atmosphere and purists will can the flight model. Devise too simple an interface and micro-managers will pine for greater control. Inject too much realism and lose a large slice of the potential audience; continually dying in the first 30 seconds of a \$99 game gets very frustrating after a while. My own bias was very clear during a recent Rant!

ON TARGET



While it doesn't quite fit our definition of a military simulation, *Harpoon 4* looks set to be the most comprehensive simulation of modern naval warfare released for the PC. Think in terms of a control centre rather than a single platform. Incorporating a full 3D environment, *Harpoon 4* will model all aspects of surveillance, combat and logistics, and include multiplayer support for up to eight players.

(PCPP #48), which sang the praises of atmosphere over accuracy. And I'm not alone. For a lot of players, the feel of flying a Spitfire is more important than getting the fuel mix right, although a quick visit to the online forums proves that just as many place a premium on realism.

Most developers get around the problem by offering a single game that can be configured to the nth degree. The simple days of Easy, Hard and Hardest levels of realism are gone in many games, replaced by the ability to specify preferences in intricate detail. Individual aspects of flight dynamics can be selected, ballistic models set, and AI skill levels modified. Similarly, atmospheric factors such as sound effects, music



**B-17 2: sadly,
no multiplayer**



VODKA & MEDALS



This is the flight simulation to watch for in 2001. IL-2 Sturmovik promises to be the definitive air-ground attack simulation, placing the emphasis on tank-busting rather than dog-fighting. Cooperative play will be available within a single aircraft, with up to 32 players online. And it's Russian!

and lighting can be switched on or off, while peripherals such as force feedback joysticks and *really big* speakers add to both the realism and feel of the game. The result is ideally a 'one game suits all' solution, that satisfies the anally retentive while also encouraging novices to progress in skill and become long-term players. More importantly, purists can revel in the detail, while the rest of us crack on with having some fun!

Cooperative convergence

Speaking of fun, the ether has become the natural habitat of today's true military simulation enthusiast. Whether via internet, IPX or modem, the feeling of defeating a single human adversary is far more satisfying than splashing any number of AI clones, and it's on that basis that many new games are judged. Indeed, improved multiplayer capabilities will doubtless underpin the next great leap in military sims (3D technology arguably having been the first), particularly in the area of cooperative play. Players want to be able to crew the same platform and combine different games on the same battlefield; however, these options, despite the hype, remain largely unavailable today. Despite being an innovative simulation in its own right, B-17 Flying Fortress has failed in the quest for multiplayer heaven, and I'm



still hovering in my Gunship! looking for a Tank Platoon! target.

That said, there's still a lot to look forward to in both the single and multiplayer aspects of military sims. As a partially niche genre, it's not surprising that sequels have always played a major role, with many recent releases proving no exception. The current wave was started by Combat Flight Simulator 2, which has a significant following despite having broken no new ground, although it was to have been beaten to the punch by both the long awaited Silent Hunter II and Harpoon 4. And don't think you have to stick with the big names or

BEAST IN ALL OF US



Out now, Shrapnel Games' Steel Beasts sacrifices cutting edge graphics for terrific gameplay. It offers multiplayer heaven, as well as first-rate attention to detail, a solid training package, and an excellent mission editor. You can order it from their website at www.shrapnelgames.com.

sequels to find a great military simulation. IL-2 Sturmovik from the Russian developer Maddox promises to take air-ground attack to a whole new level, while Shrapnel Games' Steel Beasts, available by online order only, offers the best modern tank action since M1 Tank Platoon II.

Reports of the death of the military simulation are greatly exaggerated! There's no doubt that the quest for technical perfection and innovation has delayed the introduction of many titles over the last 12 months, but 2001 remains full of promise. Processors have reached the point where the technical aspects of simulation are relatively straightforward, allowing developers to concentrate on other aspects of the game. While most future titles will stand or fall on the quality of their cooperative multiplayer features, singleplayer military sims will continue to offer realism and atmosphere unmatched by other genres, particularly for those players prepared to combine a little business with their pleasure.

Starboard Ten! Load! Fox 1!





Evil Dead

DETAILS

GENRE

Action/Adventure

MULTIPLAYER

No

DEVELOPER

Heavy Iron

PUBLISHER

THQ

AVAILABLE

March

URL

www.evildeadgame.com

A RESIDENT EVIL-INSPIRED ACTION ADVENTURE BASED ON THE GREATEST SLASHER HORROR FLICK OF ALL TIME. DANIEL STAINES STANDS HIS GROUND AND PREPARES FOR THE WORST...



(above) Hang on, hasn't the chainsaw now swapped hands?



Aside from more practical uses such as chopping wood, timber and other non-living things, chainsaws have been utilised by masked psychopathic murderers in tin 'n' kill horror movies since the '80s. Indeed, the ever-reliable chainsaw still reigns supreme as the ultimate in topless-teen-slashing devices.

However, as the old maxim goes, a tool is only as good as the person who wields it and some people just can't wield the old chainey with the finesse it deserves. It's all a matter of style, you see. If you don't have it, you don't have it. Well, meet Ash: protagonist, hero and all round legendary star of the cult classic movie, *Evil Dead*. Ash is a man who certainly does have it. Especially when wielding a chainsaw. A chainsaw that, you must know, is *directly attached to his arm*. Now that's style.

This is my boom stick

Matt Coohill is the Lead Designer of Heavy Iron's upcoming splatter horror fest *Evil Dead: Hail to the King*, a game based on one of the most over the top horror movies of all time. Coohill was kind enough to answer a few questions just prior to getting his evil, satanically possessed right hand amputated. (Moral: evil games have evil consequences for their makers - just look at John Carmack.)

Gasping as doctors fight to keep control of his now malignantly violent appendage, Matt reflects on the development process of HTTK and how Heavy Iron attempted to please the notoriously anal *Evil Dead* fans while making something that would appeal to everyone.

"Some people are going to love this game no matter what and others are going to say that it didn't live up to the expectations of the series," he pants, trying not to notice the blood splattering the walls around him. "So, in trying to make the game as good as possible for every person out there, we kept focused on three things. Building a linear storyline that works in the *Evil Dead* universe, dealing with video game situations in a way that Ash would, and most importantly letting the player become Ash."

Become Ash - see, now that sounds fun. But how? Judging from the screenshots, the game looks to have a decidedly *Resident Evil* survival horror feel to it. The heroes and heroines in those games are always whiny, little nondescripts personified by horrid, horrid voice acting. Please, don't tell us this is just going to be an attempt to cash in on the wave of Capcom and Infogrames' success.

"We're all big fans of the survival horror genre," Coohill reflects. "We tried our best to live up to level of quality of Capcom and Infogrames. Our development team is the American portion of the [PlayStation survival horror hit] *Parasite Eve* team and, after completing that, we had a lot of ideas of gameplay elements and technology improvements we could bring to the genre. When THQ approached us with the license, we sat down, looked at the genre and saw a perfect fit."

Shop smart

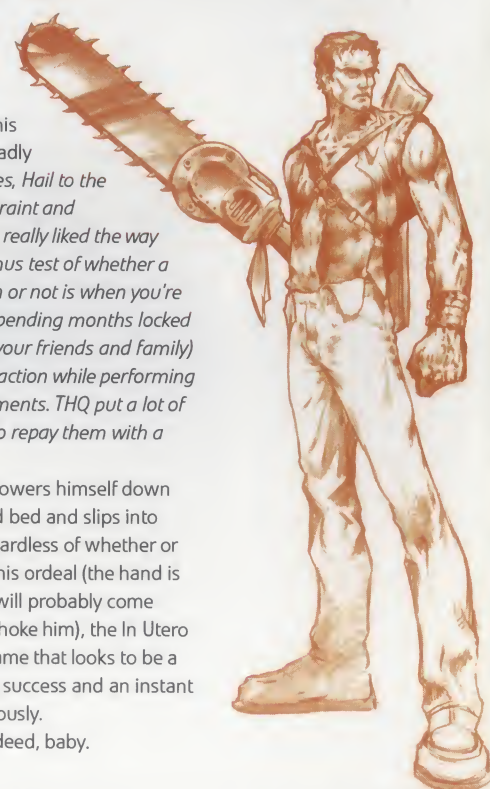
Okay, now I'm starting to get excited. And it isn't just because of the game but rather because Coohill's hand has finally been

amputated and is now scuttling along the ground in a maniacal bid to escape. Since he is now insanely waving around a stump gushing foul smelling blood where his hand used to be, I'm not sure if it's appropriate to ask any more questions - but what the hey, let's go for one last plunge. So I asked what he thinks of the end product.

Coohill calms down a little, lowers his arm and becomes deadly serious. "Like all games, *Hail to the King* had a time constraint and everyone on the team really liked the way it worked out. The litmus test of whether a game mechanic is fun or not is when you're developing a game (spending months locked up with it away from your friends and family) and you still get satisfaction while performing the key gameplay elements. THQ put a lot of faith in us. We want to repay them with a successful game."

With that, Coohill lowers himself down onto his blood-soaked bed and slips into unconsciousness. Regardless of whether or not he lives through this ordeal (the hand is still on the loose and will probably come back and attempt to choke him), the In Utero team has created a game that looks to be a potential massmarket success and an instant cult classic, simultaneously.

Hail to the king indeed, baby.

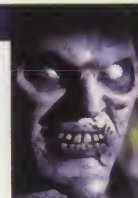




Hail to the King

AN AUDIENCE WITH **BRUCE CAMPBELL**

CAMPBELL IS THE ORIGINAL MASKED PSYCHOPATHIC KILLER. OR AT LEAST THE CHARACTER HE PLAYED IN EVIL DEAD WAS. NOW HE'S LENDING HIS UNIQUE VOCAL TALENTS TO THE GAME, AS WELL AS WRITING AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY ABOUT HIS HOLLYWOOD CAREER



PCPP Hey, Bruce. I was just browsing your web biography and noticed that you appear to be shifting your focus on to a more mainstream area of entertainment - like your regular role on *Ellen*, for instance. The question is: Are you becoming more mainstream? And if so, is this a conscious decision?

Bruce Campbell Well, an actor must go where the winds of work blow. I think any time you get a chance to have your work seen by more than college kids, you can't pass it up. My interest in doing "cult" stuff is no more or less than any other types of material. As an actor, not a "cult" actor, I enjoy comedy, drama, action, suspense, etc. and will look for it any place I can.

PCPP But you are a cult hero, how do you feel about that status?

BC Man, you've got cult on the brain, haven't you? (laughs) The only influence that "cult" stuff has on me is that in Hollywood, perception is 9/10ths the law. I have been limited in other work by this "brand," but I have also worked hard to get beyond it. I've done mostly "non-cult" stuff in the 9 years since the last *Evil Dead* flick (*Army of Darkness*) in 1991.

PCPP Speaking of *Evil Dead*, it is arguable that the series was not only one of the most successful horror franchises of all time, but that it also helped to create the genre as we know it today. From your experiences, how do you feel about the 'scene' as it is now compared to when you were doing horror films?

BC The horror scene now is very slick, with hip young actors and soundtracks. Thank God for "*Blair Witch*" is all I can say - we need to get back to some real scary stuff.

PCPP And will there be any real scary stuff in your upcoming book '*Confessions of a B Movie Actor*'? On your website you tentatively describe it as 'a slightly more realistic portrayal of the beast called Hollywood', would you care to elaborate on that a little? What can we expect from the book? Anything, for want of a better term, 'juicy'?

BC It's not meant to be an expose, but I definitely defend the work of the 99% of the folks in Hollywood (the "B" list, if you will) that never get mentioned in books. It's an anecdotal book about blue collar Hollywood told from my point-of-view and experiences. Watch for it next spring from St. Martin's Press.

PCPP Now, you are doing the voice work for the upcoming *Evil Dead: Hail To The King* game and you also have a history of voice over work with gaming industry giants like Konami and Activision. Are you a gamer yourself? And if so, what kinda games do you really dig?

BC I could lie to you, but I'm not. I am just an actor who enjoys lending my voice to this unique type of entertainment. My son Andy is a wiz, however, and I let him tell me when a finished game that I have done is any good!

PCPP We have seen shots of *Evil Dead: HTTK*, and quite frankly, looks like Andy is going to be very pleased indeed. However, with all the technical wizardry going into the production of it, do you think that it may be taking away from the traditional grass roots legacy of that the *Evil Dead* series is famous for?

BC Not at all - the atmosphere and attitude is exactly the same. Aside from that, you have to be state-of-the-art or gamers won't buy it.

PCPP On your HTTK page, you state that, "it's no secret that video games have been ripping off *Ash* and the *Evil Dead* series for years." Would you like elaborate on that statement? Who's been ripping off *Ash*? And has it been harmful or beneficial to the legacy of *Evil Dead*?

BC I'm not gonna name names, but most gamers can tell you that there are plenty of wise-cracking tough guy search-and-destroy games that have taken a hint from the *Evil Dead* games and, in some cases, even the snappy dialogue. [Hello Mr D. Nukem, he's talking to you, there.]

PCPP Just to cap off, you have got to tell us: Do you think that this game will do justice to the legend that is *Ash*?

BC Of course. This game is the next best thing to a sequel! I did the voice, sure, but I wouldn't recommend something that absolutely sucked now would I?

PCPP Groovy.

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DON'T MISS IT!

Fallout Tactics

Brotherhood of Steel

DETAILS

GENRE

Tactical Combat

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Microforte

PUBLISHER

Interplay

AVAILABLE

February

URL

www.interplay.com/falloutbos

DEVELOPED IN AUSTRALIA, THE NEW FALLOUT GAME PREFERS DESERT EAGLES TO DIALOGUE. TIMOTHY C. BEST EXPLORES THE HEAT AND DUST...



Here you see the PowerPlay crew navigating the mean streets of Redfern on the way home from work

WANDERING WASTES

When the knowledge there are random encounters between the story-progressing missions clicks with the idea of individual character experience there's an immediate mental flash. Are we talking endless rat killings?

"That was one of the stipulations, Interplay will not have rats," designer Ed Orman replies, laughing.

I am guessing that EverQuest has trademarked rats...

"We could have had a lot of dead rats. That would have made lots of people happy. We never saw any real living rats [in the original games].

"But, yeah, the theory is that people will be able to wander around, take their time, build up their experience if they want, lose people, lose the dead (because a big part of Fallout is going through people long after you've killed them) and build up their characters that way if they want, and especially if they hit a mission that they don't feel they are ready for yet."

Only in the Fallout universe.

The Fallout interface has undergone a minor facelift

I was at a party thrown by one of my game journo buddies and, in an amazing turn of events, the conversation turned to computer games. It was at this time one of my dark secrets came to light. I had never played Fallout. Once the general shock and sense that I was a complete charlatan had worn off, I was sat down in front of a monitor.

From the first moments of those sepia tones and crackling audio I knew that I had missed the boat on one of those spine-tingling games.

Ed Orman is the lead designer on Fallout Tactics, and across the line to Canberra he says, "The Fallout intro does a really good job of showing the strong 1950s mythos that Interplay created. It's all Cold War and the fear of nuclear war and then blends that - by pulling out and showing the destroyed wasteland - into this post-apocalyptic scene.

"Meanwhile, on the television, there are these funny things happening and it's funny and it's scary and it's a bit sad but also a bit humorous and that is pretty much what Fallout is."

Talking to Orman, as well as producer **Tony Oakden**, lead programmer **Karl Burdack**, lead artist **Parrish Rodgers**, you get the feeling that they have made every effort to work out just what Fallout is, so that they know the rules before they break them.

And break them they have. They have taken a brilliant roleplaying game and left it in the wasteland for a while, mutating it into something a little more trigger happy and a little less talkative.

When Fallout is a good thing

"We wanted to keep as many of the RPG elements as we possibly could, but without that getting in the way of the tactical side of the game," says Oakden. "We have true character progression. You have skills which you can allocate as the character goes up levels. You design your main character at the beginning of the game, just as you can in Fallout."

The character creation screen is pretty much the same as its RPG predecessors and all the skills and perks (bar one) make a return and several new ones rear their perky heads. Tellingly, the one major casualty is the Speech skill. The branching dialogue trees were a bit much for the game to handle. Its focus is elsewhere.

After seeing Microforte's 1998 title, *Enemy Infestation*, Interplay knew it had an engine with the ability to handle a new Fallout game. Interplay then approached the Canberra based studio with an offer to let them use the Fallout setting for something a little different.

VEHICULAR MOTION



APC



HUMMER



SCOUT



TANK

Four vehicles are scheduled to put in an appearance in Tactics each one adding to the possible threats and creative ways to bust a nigh-on unassailable position (as well as the ability to run over people). There's going to be the two-person Scouter (which lets you move past positions more quickly than a running trooper), the moderately armoured and manoeuvrable Hummer which carries four, the slow but sturdy APC which will hold your full troupe and, finally, the Tank which is pretty self explanatory. The new vehicle skill will let a character drive these beasts and you will also be able to set gunners as well. Hmm... drive-by Fallout.



College pranks can go horribly wrong...

and you'll choose between a few multi-choice responses. Orman offers the assurance that the characters will all have relevant and useful information, new objectives or at least entertain you with some colourful and retro-post-apocalyptic-1950s charm. Don't worry the game doesn't fall too far from the barren and claw-like Fallout tree.

Ready for Combat?

Players will create their main character and then take a group of five other Brotherhood of Steel comrades into action. In the beginning the roster will be fairly limited but as the game goes on you will have around 30 recruits to choose from (assuming you don't get them all killed) for the best tactical combination.

And tactics is the name of the game. The direct approach might work sometimes but Oakden says that they have tried to design the game so that direct rushes with the subtly of a punch in the face will probably quickly result in a bloody noses all round:

"We have tried to design it so that you can't play the game like that, but the Q&A seemed to find ways to 'break' certain encounters by rushing in with guys and dopping them up with chemicals. I think as a whole campaign that won't work."

The combination of elements like characters packing skills including stealth, repair, demolitions, medic, science and so forth; over a 150 weapons from lead pipes to railguns; the ability to lay mines; tactical vehicles for assault, quick transportation or even decoy manoeuvres; line of sight and fog of war; hard and soft cover; and several levels of elevation per map mean that all manner of strategies are possible.

The concept they finally came upon was: "a tactical combat game set in the Fallout universe which blends RPG with strategy elements in a mission-based game."

The game Microforte has come up with seems to be a cross between the squad-based action of Jagged Alliance and the RPG elements (and patent feel) of the Fallout universe.

Fallout Tactics departs from the RPG mould from the get-go with its mission-based structure. All of the main battles take place during discrete 'missions', as in something like Command & Conquer. On the RPG-side, all equipment, injuries, skills and experience carry between missions, there's no time limit on the game and there will be random encounters to break up things if you want to linger in the wastelands. There will be about 20 missions, which are essential to story, as well as approximately an equal number of non-essential missions which branch out from the core depending where your roleplaying takes you.

Just because the speech skill has been removed it doesn't mean that no talking will be going on. The options will be just a little more limited. Click on a character and they will have "a single blurt of speech"





That should be enough to feed the guests tonight



This guy's taking up a cunning sniper's position



Unlike Jagged Alliance or X-Com this baby has been designed from the beginning with multiplayer games in mind, down to developing the turn-based/realtime hybrid system Microforte has dubbed 'continuous turn-based'.

The system involves each character having a certain amount of action points which regenerate at a rate based on your character's stats. The interesting twist on things is that movement takes no action points meaning that mobility and tactical positioning is favoured over a flatfooted heavy-firepower approach. Oakden explains the system is similar to Final Fantasy when in operation, just a lot more intricate. "Once you get into combat it's quite subtle. It slows the combat down just enough that you can make tactical decisions," he explains.

The crew knew that something like this was required when they fired up a large map and waited for the teams to meet each other moving turn by turn. They waited and waited... and then waited some more. The free movement allowed positioning without over-balancing the firefights.

Once the guns are blazing there are a couple of ways to manage things. You can take complete manual control all of your troops with team commands (dragging and selecting them all) or you can move one character at a time and leave the others on a defensive (or offensive) stance, setting the percentage chance to hit on which they will fire. The AI will choose weapons on a number of factors including range and remaining ammo. "Basically, the way the game tends to play out is that you look at a situation and you move your guys up into tactical positions and then switch

on the AI and then manage the encounter the way you want," describes Oakden.

There will be several multiplayer mission types but the team explain that most of them will be more like Counter-Strike than Quake. When putting together your carefully picked team you'll have a huge number of options. Several Fallout races are being added to the available roster including the Alien-esque Deathclaws, Ghouls and Supermutants.

The final balancing hasn't been finished but apparently it will all be based on points, from character type to weapons and number of troopers. Orman expands on this concept: "You could choose a Supermutant, buy him the best armour buy him a big handful of drugs... er chemicals, sorry... and the biggest weapons he could carry and the nastiest ammunition you're got... and there's you're juggernaut."

"He's walking across minefields and laughing and biting people's heads off and spitting them out - but there will be tactics to combat people who take one character. You lose advantages like crossfire when you have only got one character. I'm really looking forward to people trying those things out and trying out their mega-characters on other people's teams and seeing how they go."

How does defending a set of buildings with one fast, bad-arse, Deathclaw, a sniper in a bowl-a-rama and a fully tricked out demolition expert sound? To me it sounds like one heck of a ripping blast-arama. Just you wait and see.

Sneaking up behind someone with your max-stealth scout and using the energy blade cutely named 'the Ripper' is one favourite with the team. Deploying snipers with interlocking fields of fire up on vantage points like third storey building windows is another.

One of Oakden's favourite tactics is to sneak a sniper into range to pop shots at the baddies. The AI realises that this guy is pretty good and can either rush into a trap to get him or take cover and take pot shots back. As soon as he sees them go to take cover he runs his sub-machine gun-wielding-terror forward - since the AI troops are down behind cover they don't see him before it's too late.

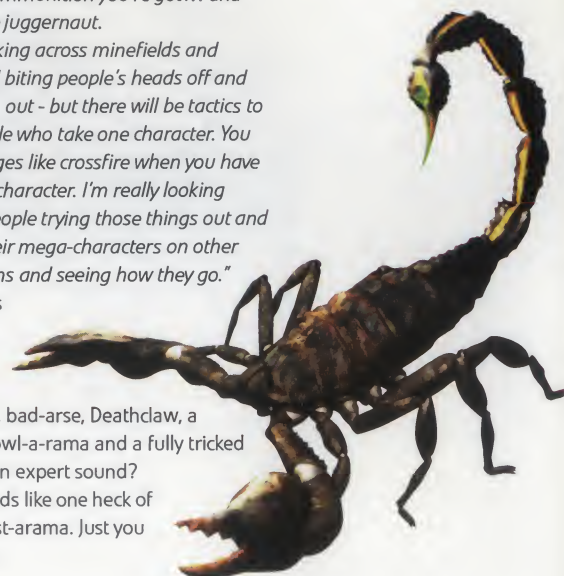
Lead Artist Rodgers confesses to liking a more comical style of play, "I really must say that I enjoy playing the trapper/demolition guy... there are some comical moments."

"Like when you put a mine on someone's face? They're leaning over trying to disarm the mine and then it blows up and sending them a million miles in the air to do some recon..."

"Air recon!" Orman pipes in with an evil grin.

Mass Mutant Mayhem

Six people, thirty-six troopers on-field, six PCs and millions of photons flying down optic cables. It's multiplayer Fallout Tactics.





Freedom Force

ROVING REPORTER JAMES COTTEE WAS ON THE SCENE IN CANBERRA WHERE IRRATIONAL GAMES IS RECREATING NEW YORK IN MINUTE DETAIL...

DETAILS

GENRE

Roleplaying

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Irrational Games

PUBLISHER

Crave Entertainment

AVAILABLE

4th Qtr

URL

www.myfreedomforce.com



"Zzzapp!" or some such suitably cheezy sound effect ought to accompany this shot

The creation of a computer game based on a generic super hero system is something of a Holy Grail amongst developers. Many have tried, over the years. Tried, and failed horribly. Now a small group of Australians are daring the impossible, and making modern myth reality in our own backyard.

Irrational Games is a spin-off of the late, lamented Looking Glass Studios, who brought us the inimitable System Shock 2. Flushed with success, the group is expanding, and one of their number with history in Australia quickly recognised the opportunity to make games in Terra Australis. **Jonathan Chey** recently granted me a tour of his development team's offices in the ACT, and an exclusive glimpse at a playable version of his baby, Freedom Force.

IGA is a startup like many others, with plenty of lounges, unusual hairstyles and bins overflowing with discarded coke cans. Offices unadorned, unlit, with all minds present concentrating on one coherent goal, an abstract vision of software perfection still a full year away. But IGA is truly different amongst the nation's great software houses, and it's not because it's working on some new massive online world, a resource gobbling patch monster that blows up monitors, or some glorified retro abomination. No, it is trying something previously thought impossible, making a tactical action game based on comic book characters, and what's more it's going to be finished.

It seems like an obvious genre for a game, one that could seamlessly combine rollicking action and Good Clean Fun in a nice little package, but for one reason or another it's never been done. Every few years, such a project is announced, and after an update or two it sinks beneath the bubbling lava waves of development hell. What can explain this curse that dogs such a simple idea? Perhaps it's related to the current fortunes of comic books themselves...

See you in the funny pages

Comic books have had a rough ride over the course of the 20th century. The means of using sequential graphic images combined with text to convey a message was first used by the cave men, but now for the most part only survives on airline crash instruction cards. This decline seems confined to the English speaking world, as comics are still in widespread use in Japan, and border on serious literature in Europe. But in America, the home of countless modern icons like Batman, the X-Men and the Fantastic Four, the medium seems to be in perpetual decline.

Once dominating vast racks in newsagents, the comic book languishes under the same fog of obscurity in Australia. If you want to read something other than The Phantom or Viz you'll most likely have to track down a specialist comic book store, where you can compete with fat sweaty men to pay grotesque prices for imported serials that don't leave much change from a tenner.

Yes, the comic world has imploded, becoming a hobby nerdier than Star Trek and more juvenile than Pokemon. It wasn't always like this, though.

Comic book fans look back with a nostalgic twinkle in their eyes to the 1950s and '60s, the so-called Golden Age of the medium. This era heralded the dawn of many of Marvel Comics' mainstays like Spiderman, The Incredible Hulk and other modern myths born of radiation given off by the burgeoning atomic age. The printing process used on these ancient texts was much more primitive than that used today, but it didn't stop these "Four Colour" heroes defining the generation of pop culture to follow.

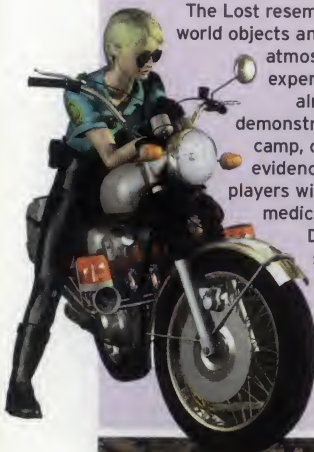
Most important of all, the gods and goddesses depicted in these tales were clean-cut heroes and positive role models. They all voted and went to church and picked up their litter; there was not a shred of ambivalence about them. These days comic heroes are murderous depraved alcoholic scum, and the only way to tell them apart from the villains is by reading the title of the front of the book. The Golden Age not only represented the peak of the cultural penetration of the comic, but a clear delineation between good and evil, right and wrong.

THE LOST

There seems to be something of a burgeoning market for surreal survival horror thirdperson adventures set in the very depths of hell. Whether it's Alice, which is like Alice in Wonderland only surreal, or Silent Hill, which is like Middle America only creepy. It's also dawned on the games industry that while it's still impossible to pirate for a given format, there's a good chance that money can be made producing games for it. Hence, Irrational Games is branching out from the PC world, and making a game for the PlayStation 2.

The Lost resembles Silent Hill, insofar as it uses real world objects and settings in a "creepy" fashion to create atmosphere, and hopefully a rewarding gaming experience. Although far from complete it's already in a playable form, effectively demonstrating how hell resembles a Nazi death camp, complete with stormtrooper demons. The evidence so far suggests that unsuccessful players will find themselves the subjects of bizarre medical experiments.

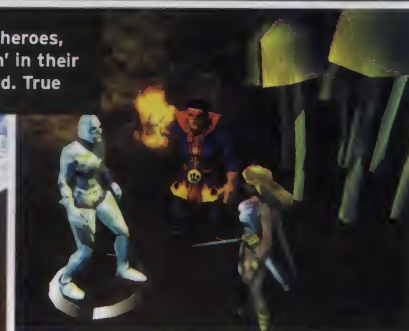
Developing for the PS2 represents a sizeable commitment both in terms of reskilling and development kits, so it's success would certainly lead to more projects on the new console. The big question will be how it fares against Silent Hill 2. The Lost will also be coming to PC.



The impressive collapsible building feature in action



Our heroes, hangin' in their 'hood. True



Golden oldies

Freedom Force seeks to capture the spirit of the Golden Age, in the same way the old Batman TV show did, though with possibly fewer teenage boys in speedos. The cast of heroes and villains are all clear cut archetypes, without a hint of duality to their name. Well, except for the heroine "Law," her costume making her look like Blind Justice, who has the ability to transform into a beefy black man called "Order." As for the fireball slinging Latino "El Diablo," one can already imagine his dialogue well in advance. Perhaps about things being spicy south of the border, or the heat being on, or some such.

Their criminal counterparts are similarly unreal, without a hint of authentic criminal psychology behind their motivations. Like the

giant mutant ants which suck entire buildings down into their subterranean lair, or the mythical god Pan who cruises up to New York on a giant floating island. His goal: to kidnap all the women in the city with his hypnotic pipes. A homage certainly to the inclusion of Thor in the Marvel pantheon, and a good barometer of the level of scientific realism in the game universe.

Engine of destruction

The proprietary game engine that will depict New York City, the giant playpen of the Freedom Force, is already looking to be a coup for Irrational. It didn't want a re-run of Syndicate Wars, where you had a beautiful city that you spent most of the game spinning like a top so you could see where

your men were. While the player can rotate the game view around if they feel the need, it's not necessary to view someone standing behind a skyscraper. Buildings become translucent as game characters approach them, a subtle and obvious transition that allows uninterrupted flow of play.

Visibility is king in Freedom Force. The screen is mostly given over to the primary display, with only the status bars of your super team and an optional map intruding on your phosphor real estate. Attack options are selected via a pop-up menu invoked by the mouse. The overall objective behind this is to make playing the game as intuitive as possible, and that this would smoothly translate into maximum "fun."

Cutsscenes are handled in the game engine, as are pivotal events within the scripted missions. Rather than have a disorientating change of scale to facilitate this, windows with enlarged versions of the characters' mugshots briefly appear, and exaggerated head movements accompany the voice acting in these primitive scenarios of right versus wrong. This technique has worked well in games like Tech Romancer and the latest iterations of the Street Fighter series, and is a proven way to lend dramatic emphasis to over-the-top cartoon violence.

Due to the modular nature of the game, and the inevitable desire to expand its



scope by creating new missions and levels, a semi-automated technique is used to synch the lip movements of the characters to the audio, and a simple set of controls is used by the voice actor or the production team to flail the head of the hero/villain as they wax lyrical. Once again, it's all rather silly, and all in good fun.

The typical effect of comic book violence, large-scale destruction, is reproduced by a surprisingly visceral game engine. Every environment is littered with objects that can react with each other like billiard balls. A super hero's plasma blast will not only result in the destruction of its target, but a clutter of cars, phone boxes, and other urban odds and ends hurled satisfyingly in all directions. The player's ability to interact with them does not end there; if your selected player is sufficiently buff they can lift motor vehicles clean off the ground and hurl them at villains hither and yon.

Most satisfying of all is the way that entire buildings can be levelled, spewing clouds of cyber-dust into the air and surrendering their polygons to gravity. They are keen to point out how this makes the game differ from Command & Conquer and its ilk, for the built environment plays a key role in tactics. Game characters can scale buildings and use height to their advantage, only to have this swept from under them.

The buildings themselves cannot be entered, as this was deemed an element that would needlessly complicate gameplay. Neither are they inhabited with innocent bystanders, as this would be inconsistent with a milieu where no one ever really dies, or if they do, they don't stay dead for long.

Same bat-time, same bat-channel

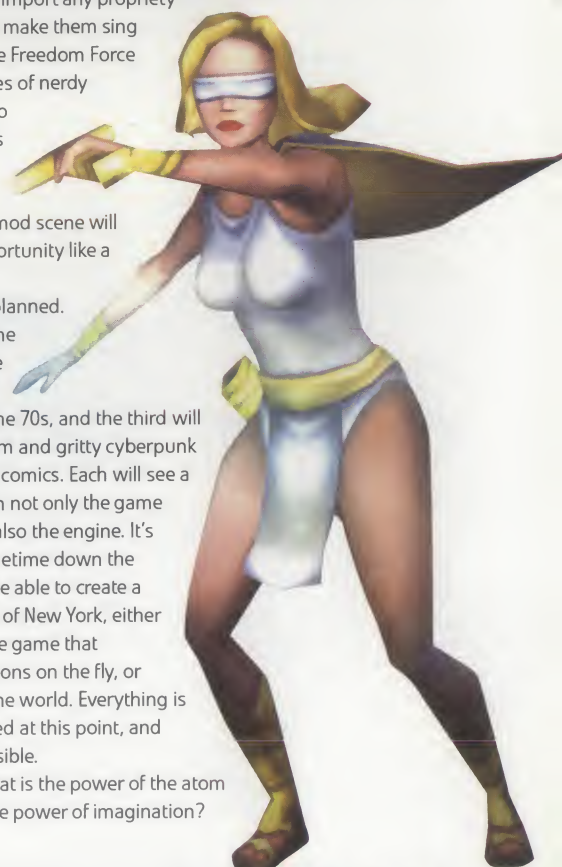
The Freedom Force project is scheduled for completion by Christmas 2001. An ambitious goal, but realistic given Irrational's methodical means of metering milestones. Every month the game is compiled and tested as a whole, each new addition integrated and scrutinised so it meshes with the existing code, and every potential bug rooted out and exterminated so there are no nasty surprises as the program approaches completion. This is the plan, at any rate. In the lobby of their offices a low-end Pentium churns away with the latest build, proving to onlookers that the game, while taking advantage of the latest videocards, is of such a simple concept to be accessible to all.

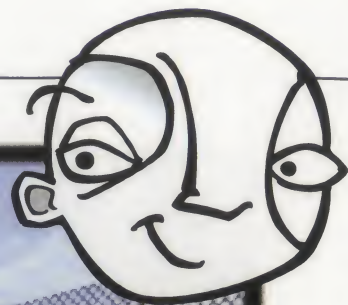
The product was hardly optimised; it stuttered, and like the other versions I was shown was hardly complete. They assured me that the program was running at a smooth 40 fps on the ancient machine "just the other day," and could survive in an environment other than the behemoth on his desk.

The retail version of Freedom Force will include a full editor, and all the multimedia tools needed to import any propriety super team and make them sing and dance in the Freedom Force universe. Spheres of nerdy influence tend to overlap, and it is expected that comic fans who are in the mod scene will take to this opportunity like a duck to water.

A trilogy is planned. The second game will be set in the comic book "Silver Age" of the 70s, and the third will be set in the grim and gritty cyberpunk work of today's comics. Each will see a different take on not only the game characters but also the engine. It's hoped that sometime down the track they will be able to create a realtime replica of New York, either as a stand-alone game that generates missions on the fly, or even as an online world. Everything is being considered at this point, and anything is possible.

After all, what is the power of the atom compared to the power of imagination?





RATBAG GAMES ON...

DIRT TRACK RACING SPRINT CARS

Hi, I'm David Hewitt, a Game Designer with Adelaide-based developer Ratbag. I am involved in the design of a number of titles here at Ratbag, including *Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars* and *Leadfoot*, for PC, and a game going under the working title of *Spin* for Sony's PlayStation2 console.

This is the first of two planned developer diaries focusing on *Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars*, which will hopefully give you some insight into how a PC racing sim is developed. I'll give you a quick rundown on the title from a design point of view, after which Chris Bevan (the game's Lead Programmer) will be able to shed a little technical light on the story.

INITIAL DESIGN

I began working at Ratbag in November 1999, and *Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars* is the first title I have been involved with as Game Designer from the very first stages through to its completion. As such, it has been something of an initiation, but one that has been made far easier by the fact that I'm working with a team of people who are enormously talented at what they do. Meeting those ever-present publisher deadlines involves working really long hours, so being passionate about what you do and committed to doing it well is absolutely crucial. I'm fortunate enough to be working with a team that is able to do this, in a relaxed, creative atmosphere.

Ratbag's *Dirt Track Racing*, released in Australia late last year, has been available in the US long enough to become a best-selling title, and garner



an impressive collection of awards. The task of designing a follow-up title was something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, I had an extremely solid foundation on which to work, and reams of feedback on the title, that proved to be an invaluable resource in refining the initial design. On the other hand, was the challenge of creating a game that would retain the elements of *Dirt Track Racing* that had made it such a success, while maintaining its own unique identity. A tall order indeed.

FINE TUNING

In the process of pulling the design of the game together, I spent a lot of time researching, and learning about sprint car racing. Setting out to create a simulation of a real-world form of motor sport involves making sure that every detail you include is accurate enough to please even the most hardened race fan. The handling of sprint cars, with their huge top-mounted wings and breakneck





acceleration is completely unique in motor sport, and we wanted to capture the exciting feeling of attempting to control one of these 800hp beasts on a dirt track. I've been able to attend races both here and in the US, and for those of you who have never experienced it, I can vouch that it's a truly heart-pounding spectacle.

We have been fortunate enough to have access to a number of sprint car drivers, team managers and mechanics as members of our beta testing

team, who pointed us in the right direction as far as things like car tuning, damage, costs of parts, and handling go. They were then able to ruthlessly criticise our efforts with each beta we sent them. By going through this process, we have been able to fine-tune the realism of the title along with its gameplay, under the watchful eye of real world experts and enthusiasts, in addition to the many hardcore sim racers that are also part of the testing program.

LUCRATIVE LICENCE

Another boon to the development of Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars was the signing of the licence to the Pennzoil World of Outlaws series, which, although not widely known in Australia, is America's second most popular racing series (behind only NASCAR), and the most prestigious and lucrative form of dirt track motor sports in the world. This allowed us to include some of the world's most competitive drivers and their cars in the game, allowing race fans a chance to jump right in and play as their favourite driver, or enter the immersive career mode, and beat them at their own game. We were also able to secure the licences to each of the twenty tracks included with Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars, which may be played along with those included in the original Dirt Track Racing, for owners of both games.

In designing Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars, we have attempted to provide sprint car fans with the long-overdue, realistic simulation they deserve, and to provide gamers in general with an enjoyable, challenging racing game with a genuinely unique feel to it. It's been a challenging and engaging process, and with development now complete I am eagerly awaiting the response it receives from both the press and the public, not to mention the simple satisfaction of seeing the finished, boxed product on store shelves. I remember late nights in the office, quite recently, where that seemed like a very long way off indeed...

David Hewitt
GAME DESIGNER - RATBAG



platform jumping

Lara leaps onto the big screen



Cross-cultural spin-offs are nothing new, and the public has seen a growing number of computer game inspired movies over the past decade. Tomb Raider is different though. It may be the first such film not to suck. Paramount is so confident of this that it flew **James Cottee** to the killing fields of Cambodia to witness the filming of a potential blockbuster. Is this going to be yet another atrocity, or will the demons of the past be finally put to rest?

The answer, dear readers, may just unfold over the next few pages...



Cambodia is not an easy place to get to. Strategically worthless, desperately poor, ravaged by communism and genocide, it lies in a black hole on the tourist landscape. Until recently it was too tawdry and dangerous even for the backpackers to explore, but now that the Khmer Rouge are finally out of power the timeless majesty of its rolling swamps are once again opening up to tourists from all around the globe.

What's more, the ancient ruins of a long lost civilisation are once again being exposed to the ceaseless erosion of snap-happy Japs and Yanks. The sprawling temple complex at Angkor Wat is



Tomb Raider is the first movie to be filmed in Cambodia in 40 years

big enough to be a wonder of the world, a huge and intricately carved monument that has survived in the tropics for a thousand years. Its huge stone spires, majestic as any cathedral, are once again stimulating the imaginations of Hollywood producers sick of the same tired old international landmarks, and Tomb Raider is to be the first movie to be filmed in these resplendent environs in almost 40 years.

The shoot is now over, and most of the Tomb Raider footage was filmed in England. This not only included Ms Croft galavanting around the countryside, but also the extremely synthetic tomb interiors, created by armies of craftsmen to look more like the ruins of antiquity than the real thing. Only the exterior shots needed to be filmed in the real world, and the ice level was shot in

Iceland. For the jungle scenes they wanted something a little different, something a little out of the way, something that hadn't already been done to death.

Hence the logistical nightmare that followed. Cambodia had no pre-existing film industry, and while labour could be found locally, all equipment and supplies had to be brought in from Thailand and England. Tons of gear, dozens of specialists, and 300 locals all on set for an intensive eight day shoot, and ultimately only a few minutes on screen. An excellent example of the demands of first world media being extracted from the poorest of peoples, eager for the tourist dollars sure to follow, ready to subvert their remaining authenticity in exchange for precious greenbacks.

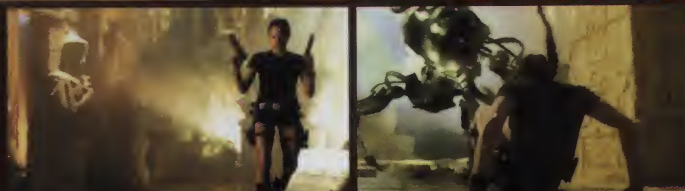
Amidst all of this chaos, Paramount decided that it would be

a really good idea to spoon-feed a handful of journalists a sneak peak at one tiny facet of the overall production, to generate some pre-release hype. To truly inspire florid prose you can't just send out a press release. You have to bring the writer in question along for the ride, give them a chance to interview the men and women behind the scenes, and maybe even a star or two. Each journo must be plied with luxurious modes of travel and accommodation. They must be wined and dined, taken on the kind of magical adventure that makes travel writers sing like birds and gets those vital column inches. They must learn that the most beautiful word in the English language is "junket."

It was thus that I was called forth to the very heart of darkness,

spiralling ever downwards through progressively obscure transport hubs. Business class, I discovered, is definitely the only way to travel. Once you get past the creepy formality of flight attendants you have never met knowing your name, you discover that at the push of a button they will bring you as many exotic cocktails and packets of mixed nuts as you can consume. The eight hours to Singapore just whiz by, especially when you are juiced up on numerous Singapore Slings.

From there it's a hop, skip and a jump to Siem Reap, tourist Mecca of Indochina and the closest airport to the shoot. The Vietnam Airlines inflight meal consisted of sandwiches in cling wrap, but you could tell that they had been prepared with the most important ingredient of all: love.





A tomb. Somewhere in Cambodia. Probably



Communists

I'd like to take time out here to rant about how my luggage was misplaced at the Saigon International Airport, and how I was forced to spend two days in the stinking jungle in the same set of clothes. The blame for this was easy to place, as the sinister agents of my misfortune infested the complex. Communists! Not your garden-variety Sydney University kind; full blown card carrying socialist baggage handlers. From the red stars on their hats to their shiny boots they radiated the kind of international socialism that wouldn't think twice about collectivising your baggage and selling your decadent western underpants for tractor parts.

By the time we reached Cambodia things were looking much better. After decades of crushing poverty and death the locals were

falling all over themselves to embrace capitalism, and the hard currency brought to the area by this noble cinematic project.

The Temple of Doom...

Once the troop of media representatives from across the region was assembled, we were taken to the set.

An outlying satellite of the enormous Wat, the Ghost Gate was a towering edifice surrounded by a satisfyingly thick cover of jungle. Crammed into the small adjacent clearing

was a huge assortment of film trucks, booms, crates and very advanced looking gear mere metres away from the extras in their conical hats.

The scene we got to witness being filmed

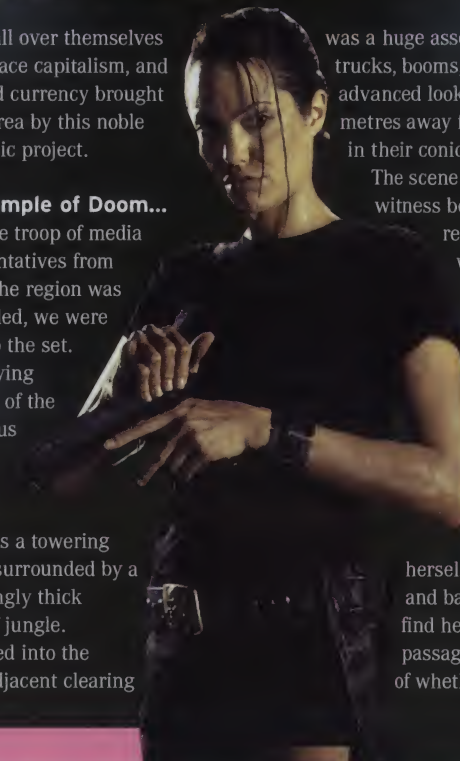
repeatedly was one where a huge labour gang was unconvincingly pulling on ropes attached to the front of the "tomb." This is the villain's way of gaining access, while Lara

herself uses cunning and balls of steel to find her own back passage. The question of whether it was right

or wrong to loot the ancient treasures of foreign lands was not really addressed at any point, but one can assume that in the movie it's a pressing matter pertaining to a planetary alignment or a prophecy or some such.

Ms Jolie, she crazy

The parade of consultants, stunt doubles, technicians, and other various creative assets we interviewed all had two things in common: The conviction that they were working on a legitimate work of art, and the compulsion to state first and foremost that Angelina Jolie is extremely talented and a dream to work with. By the time we had managed to work our way up the hierarchy to the director it felt like something out of Heart of Darkness, or possibly even Apocalypse Now.



GAMES ON FILM

There has never been a good movie based on a videogame, ever. Some may elicit a postmodern portion of meta-enjoyment, but none can be taken at face value without becoming the subject of hilarity at best, and dry retching at their worst. And there have been some shockers.



DOUBLE DRAGON

A baffling choice, this one. While the basic plot of the game may be the same as many action movies, the timing of its release was a disaster. Double Dragon hit the movies about a decade after the game enjoyed its brief reign of popularity in the arcades, and while it may have survived longer internationally, it lasted at the Australian box office for about a week.

The film actually works quite well as a comedy, as the two brothers in the game, who need only be remembered at the blue guy and the red guy quest for a magic amulet or something in a flooded near-future San Francisco. Most amusing of all is the villain ("If you think I'm bad, wait until you meet my lawyers!"), but the biggest flaw with this one is at the end the two main characters don't fight each other to the death in order to win the girl. A glaring oversight.

STREET FIGHTER

A baffling take on the unkillable video game franchise, which made a noble effort to include all 16 main characters from Super Street Fighter 2 in a coherent plot, but couldn't really decide if it was a



comedy or not. Raul Julia was cast perfectly as Bison, but Jean Claude made no effort whatsoever to cultivate the trademark Guile haircut, and the less said of Kylie's stint as Cammy the better.

Again, best viewed as a comedy, though some viewers may choose to interpret it as a horror.



WING COMMANDER

This took the rich tapestry of a well-developed and fondly remembered game universe and made a complete pig's breakfast of it. The Kilrathi are in it, fighting like godless animals against the Terrans, but it's all just horribly wrong. Rather than the sort of Top Gun meets Star Wars feel elicited by the games, this production tries to evoke the atmosphere of the Second World

War. The space fighters not only behave like propeller-era planes; they actually look like them, right down to the physical cross-hairs sitting in front of the pilots.

It's difficult to recommend this film to be watched at all, even while drunk, as its fruity sets and anticlimax conspire with the terrible acting and direction to make for a catastrophically underwhelming experience.

SUPER MARIO BROS.

Attempted to make an entertaining and coherent story out of the incomprehensible game universe of Mario & co. It failed.





Angelina turned out to be human, and shorter than expected

Angelina Jolie was the embodiment of Kurtz, spoken of in awe by all who had met her, but as the jungle was rolled back the sense of her power on those around her became increasingly apparent. The rumours of her madness came rushing back: the t-shirt she wrote on in her own blood at her wedding; the fact she's married to Billy Bob Thornton. Indeed, one's mind was cast back to the cinematic horrors of *Girl, Interrupted* and *Hackers*, and her all-too-convincing portrayal of madness.

When the time finally came one almost expected her to be holding court on a throne of human skulls. She turned out to be human, and shorter than expected. The months of intensive training leading up to the filming had left her frame quite thin, and her ample lips and bosom seemed enormous in comparison to her taunt and nubile form. Even the tan was perfect; if she had jagged polygonal edges she'd be the living embodiment of Lara Croft.

Unfortunately, she didn't have a great deal to say about the convergence of new technologies and videogames and the like, she was more interested in discussing the human interest angle of her experiences making the movie. Here traces of her famed mentality seeped through as she talked about how she truly felt she was becoming one with the character.

The fact that her estranged real life sire Jon Voight plays Lara's long lost father in the film didn't seem to help matters, as it inspired her to talk profoundly and at length about how she felt the script was reflecting her actual feelings towards her prodigal father. A few anecdotes of near-death experiences on set later and it was all over. We learned that she had in fact played the game, but enjoyed making Lara die a lot more than actually completing the missions.

Game over

Will *Tomb Raider* be a good movie? Who knows. The director is Simon West, the genius behind *Con Air*, and the three producers have worked on, among other things, *Die Hard*, *Predator* and *Boogie Nights*. Will it be worth seeing? But of course. It will be like watching a trapeze act or an air show, as the greatest possible entertainment value will not come from success, but failure. If *Tomb Raider* is actually a rollicking adventure ride of thrills, spills, and sex appeal that works well as popular entertainment and becomes a successful film franchise, well, one will almost feel ripped off.



BUYING A BUDGET PC...

We all want the biggest, baddest PC on the block, to both impress our friends and get really a good Giants framerate. But not all of us can afford the PCPP Beast, clocking in this month at a stratospheric \$9040. So what to do?

The writers and contributors at PC Powerplay have been buying PCs for years. Decades, in some cases. And never once have they paid more than \$2000. So we gave three of our most valued bargain hounds \$2000 and sent them out into the world. The only rule: buy a PC that's easy on the hip pocket, and savage on the benchmarks.

Sure, some of them took the assignment a little less seriously than others, but they all came back with one important thing to say: never pay more. Just because your PC is a budget PC, just because you bought it from a guy with a nasty skin disease working in a tiny, unventilated upstairs apartment in Broadmeadows, doesn't mean it can't be your pride and joy.



THE MARKET HUNTER

PAUL BARNSELEY

WEAPON OF CHOICE FEET



THE SYSTEM

■ Computer Market Entry	\$2
■ Day-Glo Hotdog and Coke	\$4
■ Case with Noisy Fan	\$110
■ Pre-loved ASUS A7V motherboard	\$180
■ Duron 700	\$175
■ Fan	\$10
■ 128Mb PC-133 RAM	\$140 & falling
■ Pixelview GeForce 2 GTS (check box contents)	\$190
■ 3.5" Floppy Drive (or \$20 for one that reads & writes)	\$10
■ Diamond Monster sound card	\$85
■ USB windows keyboard	\$35
■ Winbest 4D+ Mouse, winner of Polish computing magazine's "Best Thing" Award	\$25
■ Suspect CD ROM drive	\$60
(fully functional models also available)	
■ Dance Mat with bundled software	\$90 + Dignity
■ 20Gb Seagate Super ATA Hard Disk	\$200
■ Ex-Demo Model Force-Feedback Joystick	\$120
■ 2nd Hand Hub	\$20, mates rates
■ Several long network cables	\$40
■ Microphone Headset	\$10
(for Roger Wilco, fulfilling lifelong commando fantasies)	
■ Twin speakers + Subwoofer	\$70
(at this price, you know you're not getting quality, but compellingly ugly speakers with real fake wood finish)	
■ Network card	\$1
(or grab one from the 50c bucket if you're feeling lucky)	
■ 17" monitor	\$330
■ Generic 56k external modem	\$90
■ TOTAL	\$1997



■ For those used to overpriced prepacked PCs, the computer fair route can be a little daunting. However, to the accomplished bargain shopper the cavernous hall filled with piles of network cards in plastic buckets and teenagers in Heroes of Might and Magic II t-shirts can reveal a wealth of hidden treasures and a significant amount of really intriguing junk.

The best time to arrive at a computer fair is early, before rival bargain-hunters snatch up the best buys. Sadly, computer fairs tend to run on Saturday and Sunday mornings, so turning up early generally means turning up with a raging hangover. In the best spirit of free enterprise a stall always caters for the hungover and underslept, with liberal supplies of coke and fluorescent hotdogs, all for a reasonable price. Gateway certainly doesn't offer that kind of service.

The great unwashed

Even for the hardened PC gamer, there's something a little unsettling about a huge hall filled with shrink-wrapped graphics cards, mounds of old 486 motherboards and subwoofers thumping out unusually hard-rock interpretations of Britney Spears. For a start everything's stacked on wooden boards, and for some inexplicable reason this is *really freaky*. It's a bit like a William Gibson novel populated exclusively by very, very badly dressed males. Which brings me to the bad news; contrary to what the porn industry might have lead you to believe, the computer fair is not a good place to pick up. But then, neither is your Systems-

Integrator-above-the-video-shop shop or even Harris Technology. So a nil-all draw there.

The good news is that you can build a frighteningly cheap computer, provided you're willing to shop around. The key to computer market success is recognising that it's all about quantity not quality. Buried amid the cheap rip-offs of bad products (Eagle Brand Voodoo Rush a personal favourite) and software aimed at the criminally uninformed (clip-art CDs, Retribution, Inordinate Desire, Brain Dead 13 - if you remember any of these you'll wish you hadn't) there are some real bargains to be had. And the only way to find them is by checking every single plank-and-box stall.

Expect the unexpected

But it's not all GeForce 2 GTS Pros, the real delights of the computer fair are the mystery products, the things you don't really need but have to have. Heading this list is the dance game controller mat, which has all the benefits of its more expensive arcade competitors, while allowing you to look like a nob in the privacy of your own home. Soon my nightclub moves will be greatly improved by my ability to stamp my feet in response to a series of coloured arrows.

More prosaically, the market is a networker's dream - 2nd hand hubs, cables, T's, terminators and most importantly network cards are available for a fraction of store price. For first-time marketeers the most exciting revelation is that *you need never pay more than a dollar for a network card*. The government, in its wisdom, disposes of what appears to be Australia's GDP

in network card form roughly every other month, and they're virtually free. Sure you'll probably need to try six before you find one that'll work, and you won't remember which one it was next time you look, but they're so cheap!! The same goes for the hard drives and motherboards - not, I'll grant you, the kind of high-tech ones young people today have gotten used to, but when you can get a 20Mb drive for a dollar, or reassemble your childhood computer for spare change... I challenge any old timers not to shed a nostalgic tear. And for you younger folk, cheap drives look mad when you smash them with a hammer.

So go forth, sharpen your bargain hunting instinct, whet your sense of humour and buy buy buy a system whose power, cheapness and idiosyncrasy mocks the stock-standardness of your spendthrift friends' beige boxes. And above all, before parting with any money get a contact number and look in the box. As my housemate - now the proud owner of a Matrox G400 packaged in a Riva TNT box - can attest, installation becomes much harder when you don't know what the hell it is you're trying to install. ■

CONCLUSION

Computer markets take a bit of getting used to, but if you can do the hard yards and tolerate the noise, the smell and the 95% pure rubbish, you will end up with a very decent machine for your \$2000. Test drive with any multiplayer force-feedback dancing game of your choice, or that copy of Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3 your local EB has been trying to shift for the last three years. And remember, you get free clipart with every purchase.

THE ONLINE GUY

GEORGE SOROPOS

WEAPON OF CHOICE MOUSE



THE SYSTEM

- AMD Duron 700MHz
- Aopen PA50E
- 128MB SDRAM
- 20GB UDMA/66 HDD
- 1.44 MB FDD
- 48x CDROM drive
- SB Vibra 128
- OEM GeForce 2 MX DVI
- Midi ATX tower case
- AcerView 54e 15" monitor
- 2 years RTB warranty
- TOTAL:

\$1985

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The Pentium 4 Dossier

Four years ago, the growing popularity of 32-bit Operating Systems prompted Intel to launch the 130nm Pentium Pro.

Do you prefer single or multiplayer games?

- ☐ Multi only
- ☐ Mostly multi
- ☐ Both the same
- ☐ Mostly single
- ☐ Single only

VOTE [RESULTS]

■ Intel Pentium 4
At the IDF Show last month, Intel finally unveiled the much anticipated Pentium 4 processor. The Pentium 4 will be fully compatible with existing 32-bit applications and operating systems, and Intel will release chips later this year with initial speeds in the 1.4GHz range.

■ Mainboard Mando
Double data rate memory is here with VIA first out of the block.

■ Voodoo 4 4300 PCI
3Dfx has capitalised on the demand for 3D accelerators with the PCI Voodoo4 4300.

■ Timex Cancelled
Low-cost chip no more

■ DMR X-Fire 1024
Teratec have a reputation for innovative, high-fidelity audio products - audiophiles may be familiar with their Mp3o Mp3 deck, their kick-arse EXW sound cards and the original DMX sound board, reviewed in Issue 45.

■ Etailing, as you are probably aware, is the trendy, hip name for selling things online and is apparently the "way of the future" Not having a credit card of my own, due to being caught engaged in several nefarious activities in my youth, it is a world which I have never been a part of. Until now.

When our glorious leader asked me to write an article detailing my adventures buying a PC online I thought good-o, some easy money, I'll just search out all the online PC sellers in Australia drop them a line about having \$2000 to spend on a PC and then sort through the offers and suggestions as they came in. However I soon discovered that I was not the only one unfamiliar with etailing. As it turns out none of the people doing it have a bloody clue either.

You'd think that when someone offers to throw \$2000 your way you'd be pretty keen to grab it. Let me tell you how many of those retailers bothered answering my email: Zero. Zed. Nada. None! The only response I got was a 'mail undeliverable' error message telling me that one of the etailers ordering links wasn't even working. Excellent. That's the clever country for you. I'd hate to think what it would be like here if we were the stupid country.

The sound of silence

So after my spectacular success I was left in the rather annoying position of having to wade through and compare all the individual components and ready-built machines on offer at each site, an experience I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy, even if it were a Daddo.

Accessories	Backups	Cases	CD-ROMs	Controllers	CPU's	Cameras	Floppies	Home
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PC Systems	Printers	Scanners	Software	Sound	Speakers	Video Cards	Specials	New Cart
Combos	Manufacturers	Everglide	Aus PC Market On-Line Store	USB	HELP	Search		

AUS PC

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Arctic Silver arrives!

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Independant review by GlobalReviews

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We're back from the break on 8th January.

See our News for more info.

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Pine MP3 CD player back in

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Welcome to Tom's Hardware Guide

Updated: January 13, 2001

The U.S. Fund for UNICEF
www.unicefusa.org

ARM YOUR SOCKET A!

Digital Video Guide

January 11, 2001
Video Editing for \$250: Pinnacle Studio DV Plus
The Studio DV Plus is a low-priced video editing card with a digital fire wire interface. We raised the question: what use is the card when used in conjunction with DV cameras?

Ready For The Messes:
Video Editing With Matrox AT2000
• HPE-4 - Copying a DVD Video to CD-ROM
• Digital Multi-Talent: Sony DCR-PC100E
• More Releases

January 13, 2001
Athena could not see Sam's last secret

January 13, 2001
Microsoft's new...
Microsoft's new...

January 13, 2001
The World's Most...
The World's Most...

January 13, 2001
The World's Most...
The World's Most...

Apart from the monumental boredom involved, a boredom so deep and wide and powerful that it could make ancient alien cultures tremble half way across the universe, it also requires lots of writing things down. I hate writing things down. If God had expected us to have to write things down he would have genetically engineered a notepad on our left arm, or at least let us have slaves instead of all those annoying commandments.

At least if you go into a shop you know someone is going to be there - they may smell slightly of BO, they may not wash their hair very often, but they're there. And if they've been there for a while they'll know which bits work well with which other bits because they've had to put them together time and time again.

Return of the great unwashed

This is what I was hoping for when I emailed my request to these so-called etailers, a bit of experienced help. Instead I had to turn to some of the many and fine hardware review sources such as the PCPP PowerTest, Tom's Hardware

Guide and others. However looking at the reviews for individual components can sometimes be misleading as some combinations don't work as well as others, giving performance that doesn't quite match up to the statistics.

That's where experience comes in and that's where the etailers fall down. Of course if you are a bit of a hardware freak yourself you

probably don't want any advice from anyone, you would know exactly what you want and how much it should be. For you etailing is probably the best way to go, you are not after assistance or advice just a service to give you what you ask for when you ask for it.

So after an exhaustive search that turned up everything from women having sex with donkeys to a site that told me what I had always wanted to know about sponges, here is a PC that I found online. ■

CONCLUSION

Yes the future is out there; it's just that we'd rather it was in here. Personally, I would never buy online something as unreliable and error prone as a PC. When your PC really gives you grief you deny yourself the pleasure of going down to the shop you got it from and really letting fly. Get out all those pent up frustrations; exorcise the demons of all those girls who rejected you and just yell and scream a bit. It's that sort of social interaction that makes the world go round, that makes life worth living, and it just isn't the same when it's done by email, especially when they don't even answer!

THE INSIDER TRADER

ANTHONY FORDHAM

WEAPON OF CHOICE

WINNING SMILE



THE SYSTEM

■ Case: Lian-Li PC-60 (dodgy insurance claim)	\$100
■ Power: 300W (overlooked by distributor)	\$0
■ Motherboard: ASUS A7M266 (stolen)	\$0
■ Memory: 256Mb DDR RAM (stolen)	\$0
■ CPU: Athlon 1.2 GHz (theft from other mag)	\$0
■ Hard drive: Seagate 30Gb 7,200rpm (ex-employee discount)	\$320
■ CD-RW: Creative Blaster 121032 (not invoiced, stolen)	\$0
■ DVD: Sony 12x (ex-employee discount)	\$175
■ Videocard: Hercules 3D Prophet II GTS Pro (in-house theft from other mag)	\$0
■ Sound: Hercules Gametheater XP (stolen)	\$0
■ Monitor: Sony G400 19" FD Trinitron (gift)	\$0
■ Floppy: 3.5" Sony (cannibalised from old PC)	\$0
■ Keyboard, mouse: Gateway keyboard and MS Intellimouse (stolen from work)	\$0
■ Gaol term: 3 months	
■ TOTAL	\$625
(not including court costs or loss of regular income through being fired)	

■ Those of you who subscribe to the Journalists' Code of Ethics should look away now, because what I'm about to do is the baddest thing anyone with a shred of honesty can do. That's right, I'm going to steal from the people I rely on.

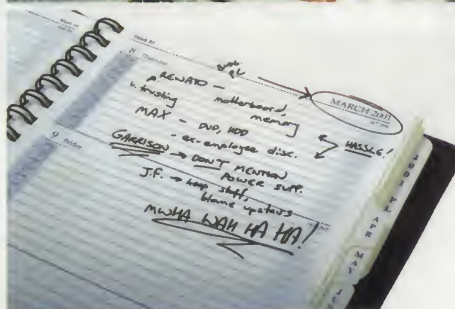
First step is the pile of gear already in the office. Flip to p90 and have a look at the PowerTest. Now I would have stolen the Hercules 3D Prophet II Ultra, but unfortunately we only had a pre-release version that didn't have drivers. Of course, for the PowerTest we had just downloaded the drivers off the Net, but I wanted to have a big glossy retail box to stick in my wardrobe, so I decided to steal the 3D Prophet II GTS Pro instead. I know Jean Francois from Guillemot won't mind; in fact he won't even know because he lent the card to a *completely different magazine*. That's the key you see. Let inter-office politics take care of difficult situations.

Dropped the case

For the case I like the Lian Li PC-60, reviewed on page 96. I gave my mate Garrison Huang at Australian PC Accessories a call and said what with one thing and another, the fluctuating dollar, Venus rising in Capricorn, I had dropped the case he leant me down a flight of concrete steps and it was completely bugged and did he want it back after all? He said no, it was fine but it would cost me \$100 for the insurance or something. Since the case retails at over \$400 I said that was fine. But the clever bit see, the really clever bit is that while I had indeed dropped the case downstairs, *it only had a tiny ding in it*. Plus Garrison had forgotten he also lent me a power supply. Nice.

Property is theft

Now I had to fool some people into thinking I was reviewing product when in reality I just wanted to steal it. So I took a taxi at company expense over to Burwood and saw Renato at Achieva. He fixed me up with a very nice ASUS



A7M266 motherboard, newest of the new, and also 256Mb of DDR RAM, which he insisted he needed back by the end of the week because it was the only RAM of its kind in the country. Yeah yeah, I assured him, Friday morning, no problem. Back at the office I signed off for some petty cash to pay for the lunch I took Renato to, then I ran upstairs to a *completely different magazine* and stole an Athlon 1.2 GHz CPU while their tech editor wasn't looking.

Ergo: theft is property

A few reassuring phone calls later, and Max at BCN Technology had supplied me with a Seagate 30Gb 7,200rpm hard drive at a special ex-employee's rate, which was all fine and above board. As for the monitor, well a couple of weeks ago I actually saved up and bought, legitimately, a Sony G400 19" FD Trinitron, and since I was cheating at everything else in this article, I figured I might as well pretend Sony had given it to me for free for going to the Gateway Christmas Party (there is logic to this I swear). And of course, I already had a Hercules Gametheater XP sound module - one of two in the country - loaned to me by Jean Francois again, and since he's going to be angry when he finds out I've stolen his videocard, he might as well be angry that I've stolen his sound module as well.



Nick at Creative had already sent me a very nice top of the line Creative CD-RW (reviewed on p98), so I whacked that in the machine as well. Finally though, after minutes of ringing people and pleading and grovelling and whining, I couldn't source a free DVD-ROM, so I went back to BCN and got a Sony 12x for a discount because, as I mentioned, I used to work there.

So now I sit barricaded in my room waiting for the cops to break the door down, living off nothing but pizza delivered through the mail slot and a case of Jolt cola that should have gone to a Letter of the Month reader. I'm lonely, cold, and they will probably cut the power soon. But by God I have a kickarse computer. ■

CONCLUSION

The 'rob 'em blind' method of Budget PC acquisition has much to recommend it; you do end up with a very high-spec PC for next to no money at all, but it is important to take into account the social cost of such a method. Gaol is unpleasant, as is the inevitable loss of your job. At the very least, your suppliers will refuse to talk to you and there will be no product for your magazine. Your editor will get upset, throw things at you, and a posse of disgruntled IT distributors will hunt you down in the street and beat you to within an inch of your life. That said, you will be able to play any game at any resolution, for hours on end during the siege, and that's what's really important, isn't it? (You're fired - Ed.)

PS2

PSX

PC

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IN REVIEW

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I finally did it. I saved up and shelled out for a 19" monitor. And let me just say, it's a whole other world. Q3A has been given a new lease of life. Forget videocards, forget faster CPUs and memory upgrades, save for a 19" monitor. It will change the way you play.

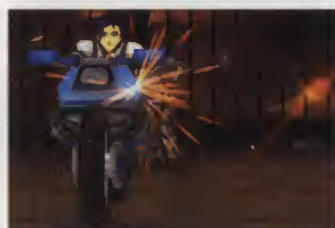
I didn't just mention Quake 3 Arena in passing there either, because this month we received our long-awaited copy of Quake 3 Team Arena. And here's the thing. We've waited a long time for this pack, it's the first official add-on from id since Ultimate Doom. We were expecting a lot. But we only got a little bit.

I have always been disappointed by id games. It's not that they're not good; Quake 3 Arena is excellent, it's my deathmatch platform of choice. But the gameplay is just the same as we had in Quake and Quake 2. Sure, the jump pads in Q3A give it a nice Mario feel, but basically you're still just running through a maze shooting people.

When is id going to release a game where we go 'wow' not just at the engine, but also at the gameplay itself? They have some of the finest programming minds on the planet, but their game design borders on the infantile. Time for id to hire some writers.

While we wait there are still hundreds of other new games out there, a few of them quite good. Which few? As ever, the following pages will tell you...

anthonyf@next.com.au



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78	Galaga
79	Battle Isle: Andosia War
80	Rainbow 6: Covert Ops
80	X-Gold
81	Sheep

THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

90+	Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
89-80	A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
79-60	Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
59-40	Decidedly average, probably boring.
39-0	A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.
Need	The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed.
Want	The ideal system requirements for the game.
For	The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.
Against	The major reasons why you won't.

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Write your answer on the back of an envelope, addressed to: **Microsoft Game of the Month, PC PowerPlay, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern NSW 2016**

PC PowerPlay

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QUAKE 3 TEAM ARENA

Epic won't be losing any sleep over this

DETAILS

GENRE

Action

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

id Software

PUBLISHER

Activision

DISTRIBUTOR

Activision

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

MA15+

NEED

PII-300, 64Mb RAM,
16Mb 3D Videocard

WANT

PIII-600, 128Mb
RAM, 32Mb 3D
Videocard

ONLINE

www.planetquake.com

Download some
good mods for Q3



Flying the flag for Team Arena. Well, someone's got to do it



It's amusing to note the faintly desperate attempt by the *Quake 3: Team Arena* manual to garnish the game with a few strands of plot. "Little is known about the mysterious *Vadrigar*", it begins. Indeed, over the course of the following dreary paragraphs, this becomes depressingly self-evident. Yet the absence of a narrative doesn't translate into a shallow game. After all, id Software games have traditionally favoured explosions over explication, machineguns over motives.

Quake 3 was one of the least complicated games in years, yet all the better for it. What it lacked in width, it gained in depth; the subtlety and nuance of its pure deathmatch takes months to reveal in full, and longer yet to master. As we may have mentioned on numerous occasions, it remains the deathmatch title of choice; the simplicity, the brutal elegance (or is that elegant brutality?) of its core gameplay has yet to be surpassed.

However, when pitted against the expansive teamplay options of *Unreal Tournament* or *Counter-Strike*, *Quake 3* cratered badly. As an expansion to *Quake 3*, *Team Arena* is id's attempt to compete in the more sophisticated team-based multiplayer league. While it certainly adds a layer of

complexity through its three new play modes, it's less clear whether *Team Arena* brings any more depth to the game experience.

Blokes and chicks

Consisting of a trio of play modes, a clutch of character models (plus a few more skins), sixteen maps, a new interface and 'rune' power-ups by the handful, *Team Arena*'s new features seem substantial at a glance. However, upon closer scrutiny the lack of innovation is betrayed by some delicate fudging of the issue. There's little that's genuinely new here.

Gracing us with their presence are four extra character models, although two are reserved for exclusive use in *Q3A* maps. These two - Pi and Fritzkrieg, a Borg-like valkyrie and deranged mutant Nazi, respectively - have been designed with personality and complement the original's distinctively motley crew. In stark contrast, the *Team Arena* duo come in 'bloke' and 'chick' form, with only a bunch of uninspired (and virtually interchangeable) skins used to differentiate various team members. Should

any conclusion be drawn from the fact that Paul Steed left midway through the production? The cynical might suggest his contribution to id's success was greater than imagined, his absence opening a void that's since proved hard to fill.

Passing over the revamped interface (it's an improvement, by the way), we move onto the power-ups - or 'items' to once again borrow from the ever-so-evocative manual. Items introduce an element of class-based strategy, creating relatively more offensive or defensive skilled players. The concept is simplistic compared to *Team Fortress*, but within such limited confines the execution is a moderate success.

Yet two small criticisms are worth noting. The primary-coloured power-ups rotate around the player once collected and can make it tough to tell which team the carrier is on - a factor exacerbated by the similar looking skins. And, for the most part, their effects are just slight tweaks of power-ups already existing in *Q3A*. Ho, and indeed, hum.

TERRAIN MAPS

Perhaps the only genuinely new feature of the Team Arena package arrives in the shape of the vast, outdoor environments. These large-scale maps are technically possible through the use of simplified architecture and limited textures. Nonetheless, they are certainly impressive to view, and on a par with anything we've seen in Tribes 2. Unfortunately, with anything less than a good 20 players, they make for a fantastically dull game experience.



The 'all-new' chaingun in all its rehashed glory



From a distance you couldn't tell if this guy's Red or Blue



Another drab player model



I was renamed Van Gogh after this

Welcoming committee

Continuing this trawl through the bullet point list of features on the back of the box, we now arrive at the weapons. There are three new methods with which to gain frags. Two are rather dull: the nailgun is like the shotgun but with nails; the chaingun is like the plasma gun but with bullets - and a chain, presumably. Of considerable

more value to the gameplay is the prox launcher, which deploys proximity mines that stick to objects. Attached to the entrance to a base, mines make for a nifty welcoming committee. With a little skill

they can also be planted on the backs of opponents or, even more gratifyingly, on the flag itself. As a fan of the original weapon set, the lack of significant additions doesn't concern me. However, given Team Arena's status as 'add-on', it's odd that so few have actually been added.

In our preview last month, Anthony described in comprehensive fashion the new play modes on offer. It's worth repeating them here, not only for those who missed but because they won't take up much space. Interpret that how you wish.

Besides the now *de rigeur* Capture the Flag, the other modes each deliver a variation on the same theme. One Flag CTF sees the two teams fighting over a flag they must plant in the opponent's base. Overload requires the destruction of a 'skull obelisk' erected in the opponent's base. Harvester rewards frags with skulls that must be deposited in the cleverly titled 'skull receptacle' in the player's own base.

Each mode emphasises a different facet of play - defensive or offensive - to varying degrees. In addition, each one is better suited to different sized maps - Overload, for instance,

is tedious on a large map, but markedly more exciting the smaller the playfield shrinks. Combined with the choice of runes, the modes eventually elicit a murmur of tactical consequence. With this in mind, Team Arena almost appears like a viable alternative to Team Fortress, Counter-Strike or UT's Assault and Domination modes. But it isn't.

Ultimately, Team Arena lacks cooperative depth. Sure, with its faster pace, it offers a unique take on the teamplay genre, but remains too insubstantial to compete. Team Arena occupies a bit of a no-man's land between the pure deathmatch of Q3A and the tactical breadth of its rivals. Indeed, the team objectives tend to serve as a distraction from what Quake has always excelled at - that is, matching wit and reflex against the enemy in a duel to the death.

The fact it's taken id Software a year to put together what is in essence a minimal upgrade for Quake 3 suggests one of two things. Either Carmack and co are growing complacent or they've been working much harder than we thought on Doom 3. Fingers crossed the latter is more accurate. After the disappointment of Team Arena, id needs Doom 3 exceeding everyone's expectations to recover the developer's flagging credibility.

David Wildgoose

PCPP

FOR

- It looks prettier
- Budget price

AGAINST

- Extra modes are lightweight
- Paucity of new weapons, power-ups, models, etc...

OVERALL

A completely uninspired add-on

57%

GIANTS CITIZEN KABUTO

It's been released! Finally... <faints>

DETAILS

GENRE

Action Strategy

MULTIPLAYER

Yes (1-10, Internet or LAN via TCP/IP)

DEVELOPER

Planet Moon

PUBLISHER

Interplay

DISTRIBUTOR

Interplay

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

M15+

NEED

PIII-500, 64MB RAM, 32MB 3D videocard (D3D)

WANT

The Beast - seriously

ONLINE

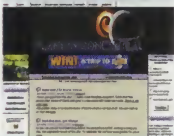
www.interplay.com/giants/index2.html

The official site for all things officially related to the official game. Yes!

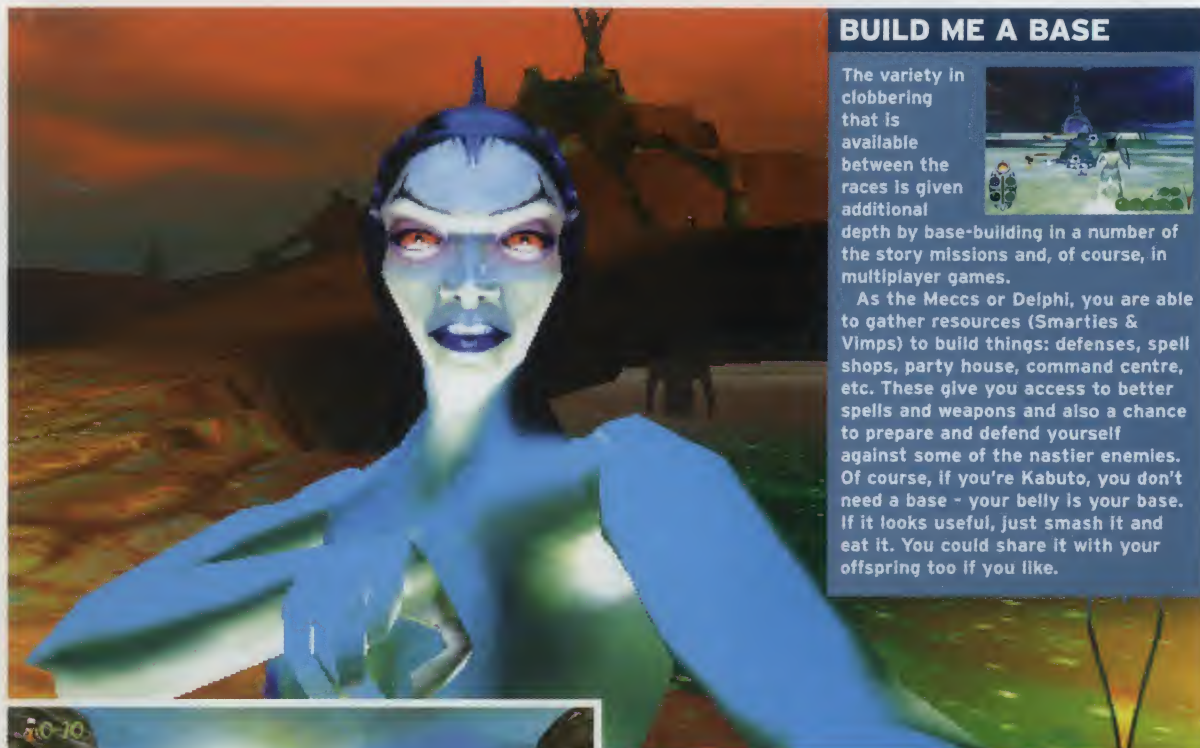
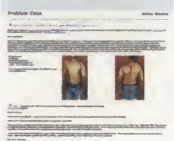


www.planetmooncentral.com

A fan site for fans of this game and other Giants games from Planet Moon studios.



www.belgianorthoweb.be/question/gigantism.htm
Some information on Gigantism, which is a horrible thing really



BUILD ME A BASE

The variety in clobbering that is available between the races is given additional



depth by base-building in a number of the story missions and, of course, in multiplayer games.

As the Meccs or Delphi, you are able to gather resources (Smarties & Vimps) to build things: defenses, spell shops, party house, command centre, etc. These give you access to better spells and weapons and also a chance to prepare and defend yourself against some of the nastier enemies. Of course, if you're Kabuto, you don't need a base - your belly is your base. If it looks useful, just smash it and eat it. You could share it with your offspring too if you like.

Delphi's nipples have been covered up in the final release...



... but a quick patch reveals her as nature intended

thus master of none. And mostly the game is tight, with the different sections and gameplay types working well together. The sum of its parts is engaging, good-natured fun and that makes Giants: Citizen Kabuto a real winner.

Giants is epic in the sheer number of missions the player must complete. Rather than choosing a creature, you play each race in turn, as the story progresses. It begins with the Meccs crashing on the Island to find the Smarties in dire need of assistance. By and by, we move to more global concerns and this is where the Sea-Reapers take over, specifically one Reaper called Delphi. In the end, you'll have the chance to be (and beat up) Citizen Kabuto. Each race has at least four stories and within each story there are between two and six missions, so there's an impressive amount to do.

Striated dingle

But Giants is set to shine as an innovative multiplayer game, and Planet Moon knows this. So the singleplayer missions are mostly extended training on how to use the various aspects of play, so that in a multiplayer situation you can do what you wish. To this end, the missions themselves (especially early on) all seem to follow the form of a Smartie saying "here's a new thingy, go use it to collect a striated dingle, then bring it back to me." They are rather safe and self-contained.

The cutscenes break up the action into logical sections and of course, give you a narrative reason to collect that striated dingle for the Smarties. The cutscenes also

A human story

Giants is basically a narrative of how we get along, it's a human story, a lesson to the people of the world... well, actually it's just a story about three species stuck on a magical, spaceborn island. The Meccaryns, five little humanoid types with British accents and rocks in their heads (big hearts though). The Sea Reapers, luscious barely clad, evil sirens with magic powers and French accents. And Kabuto. With green skin, a mountainous bulk, enormous gnashing teeth, flaming eyes and a wicked appetite with a temper to match, Kabuto is well... indescribable. A supporting cast of Smarties (intelligent local inhabitants), Reaper Guards (thugs), the Rippers and other local wildlife, all play a part in creating a living game world.

This is a sprawling epic. This is simple 3D action. This is a three-race strategy game. This is a gentle comedy. This is Giants: Citizen Kabuto. If you've heard a lot about it, you aren't alone. A development comprised of ex-Shiny employees was bound to impress, and Planet Moon teased and titillated with glimpse after glimpse of this artistically spectacular game. They strung us along for months, years even. Well now we've played Giants. Does it work? Is it a success? For the most part, yes.

Comprising elements of 3D action, adventure, strategy (in combat and resource management) and even racing, Giants offers an awful lot. Of course, the danger here is that Planet Moon is jack-of-all-trades and



Kabuto stores food on his shoulders

flesh out the characters, and highlight the differences between the Meccs, Delphi and Kabuto. The Meccs are the most traditional race - big guns, squads combat and jetpacks; it's high-tech and familiar territory. Delphi the Sea Reaper renegade on the other hand, relies on magic. She also has arrows and a sword for more intimate occasions. Finally, the enormous Kabuto is brute force personified. He

doesn't go around others or their homes - they move out of his way or get crunched. Kabuto's weapon is his body.



Meet some of Island's local fauna

Kabuto's defence is his body. Kabuto's energy comes from eating his enemies. It's that simple a process.

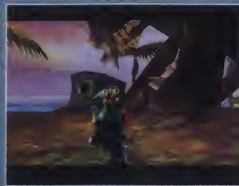
Squads 'n' bugs

The three races have the best variety in gameplay style since Starcraft. It's a genuinely different feeling playing each of them - not just three identical races with an extra striated dingle each. The squad tactics of the Meccs are completely different to the solo assassin style of Delphi. Both are miles from the monster-truck rally tactics of Kabuto.

But there are bugs. The AI varies widely from impressive to downright stupid - for both your enemies and allies. There are some graphical errors like tunnelling creatures tossing up dirt through rivers. And I found that on occasion I was

invincible for no

TAKE MY WIFE... PLEASE



The freshest aspect of Giants is the great humour it has in the face of a long and involved story. Epics, as we know them, tend to the solemn and oh so serious. It's the voice acting but it's also the clever script and the brutal obsession with the punchline, whoever or whatever that may be. Take for example, the fact that the Meccs are actually on their way to Planet Majora when they land on the Island. Or any of the Smarties or my personal favourite, Borjoyzee (love that Young Ones humour). Or better yet, take a look for yourself.



Taking aim at a Meccaryn

apparent reason - that's a first I must say. These mistakes show sloppiness (what's beta testing for?) and Giants loses some of its sheen under these errors.

Another drawback for some gamers will be that Giants is extreme high-end gaming. To get the game running smoothly at a decent resolution you will need the PCPP Beast. Turn to p100 to see what you're up for. We're not kidding here, the ideal spec for this game is astronomical. The minimum requirements set out in the documentation are highly optimistic to say the least (PII-266, my arse...). On a lowly system such as a PII-400 with a 32MB videocard or equivalent the game will run like a lame duck that's been beaten with a cricket bat and stapled to the floor.

Giants: Citizen Kabuto is like an old Hollywood musical. It's big, it's busy, there's action, brains, love, humour and if nothing else, it's incredible eye candy. The out-of-the-box bugs are just enough to pop your bubble and for me that's disappointing since there's so much to love about Giants. The definitive game of its kind? Maybe not but it's the closest yet and superb fun.

John Dewhurst

PCPP

FOR

- Three unique styles of play
- Acting polygons!

AGAINST

- Sloppy bugs
- Steep system reqs
- Missions unoriginal

OVERALL

Giants leap for gaming sounds the death-knell for your PC

86%

ONI

Ooh, she's looking at me...

DETAILS

GENRE

Action/Adventure

MULTIPLAYER

No

DEVELOPER

Bungie

PUBLISHER

Bungie

DISTRIBUTOR

Jack of All Games

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

TBA

NEED

P-200, 32Mb RAM

WANT

PII-300, 64Mb RAM

ONLINE

www.oni.bungie.com
Oni central

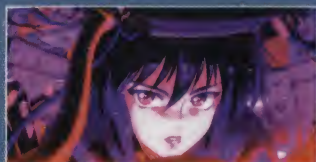


It wants... feet! Lines like that make me love Japan. Lines like that help Westerners like me appreciate what a unique country Japan is. Think about it: who else but the Japanese could create fantastically bizarre epic stories revolving entirely around the adventures of a schoolgirl and her talking, super-powered panties? Who else but the Japanese could make millions marketing a cartoon that induces epilepsy and schoolyard violence? Who else but the Japanese could make a game including a giant talking computer brain that suffers from acute egomania and has a foot fetish? Who else? Well, the Canadians, apparently. Say hello to Oni.

MANGA MAYHEM

As you probably noticed, Oni has a decidedly Jap-anime feel to it. Bungie felt the

quicksilver atmosphere of anime in general was a perfect fit for this type of action game. As a result, Oni is heavily influenced by such anime greats as Akira, AD Police and the more recent Ghost in The Shell. Which, I'm sure you will all agree, can't be a bad thing.



Console demon

Oni, for those of you wondering, is Japanese for 'demon'. Oni, for those of you wondering, is probably the only non-Asian developed game that manages to capture the esoteric and oft exploited essence of Japanese animation. Oni, for those of you wondering, is a damn fine game.

In fact, Oni is such a damn fine game that this reviewer's previously held conviction to go out and buy a new console has suddenly become less of a conviction and more of a mere possibility. A slim possibility. A slim possibility brought about by the fact that, when one conveniently ignores a few minor quibbles here and there, Oni is as good as a console game is going to get without an actual console being involved.

I heard that. You disgustingly grunted when I mentioned consoles, didn't you? You're recalling the atrocity that was Dino Crisis, aren't you? You're thinking of low resolutions and lazy PC ports and horrid console conversions of Doom and Quake. Well, stop. Oni was developed especially for the PC and as such everything - excepting a few minor quibbles - is streamlined to get the most out of the latest hardware. Those in possession of some meaty speakers and a Geforce 2 won't be disappointed, as Oni is



technically splendid. Utilising animation interpolation - a technique that allows for multiple frames of animation to occur at once while melding with each other seamlessly - Bungie has created a world full of vibrant, smooth moving, beautifully rendered characters for the player to interact with. Sure, they're not the most interesting people to talk to and they're not exactly going to discuss Nietzschean ethics with you, but - hey - this is an action game and, what the hell, they still look superb.

Femme fatale

Come to think of it, 'superb' is a more than adequate way to describe the game's main protagonist and fist-swinging femme fatale, Konoko. Through sheer brilliance of design, Konoko is one of those rare characters that

KNUCKLE SANDWICH COMBO

Oni is something of an oddity in its execution. The combat dynamics could be described as a cross between Tomb Raider and Final Fight with a dash of Virtua Fighter thrown in for good measure. Aside from simply blasting her foes into pulp with weaponry, Konoko can execute all sorts of neat combos from the simple double punch/uppercut type stuff to the spectacular, and eerily sexy, flying leg choke. Now that's bizzo with style.



That wall was just asking for it...

manages to capture your imagination without actually *doing* too much. She doesn't say much and when she does there's enough girl power bravado in it to make the Spice Girls jealous, but - hey - she's damn cool.

Besides being damn cool, it is in her personage that the crux of Oni's goodness lays. Sure, running around beating up baddies and shooting villains isn't exactly the most intelligent way a gamer could spend his or her time, yet Oni doesn't make any pretence to being the revolutionary product of a super-genius. Instead, Bungie has been quite content to market Oni as a simple action game. Oni isn't 'smart', it isn't a defining gaming moment and it probably isn't even all that memorable, but much like Konoko herself, you can't help but like it simply because it's so good and silly. But then there are the quibbles...

Messy fingers

They've been mentioned three times now, so you're probably wondering what these quibbles are. Firstly, the controls. Bungie has obviously taken great pains to make Oni as PC-friendly as possible, and to a certain extent it works very well. It was a good idea to try and make Oni's controls as Quake-centric (ie. the WASD keys combined with



Would you care to dance?

the mouse) as possible, but is this type of control method viable for a game with a melee combat focus? It does *sound* easy to do - just left-click and right-click and press shift, etc - but in practice it can get a touch fiddly. Often your fingers end up in a tangled mess thanks to the way the various actions are configured on the keyboard. Which brings us to...

Another quibble: the options. Look, Bungie, I don't know what you were drinking when it came to putting in the options part of your game, but I'd really like to know because it must have been pretty bloody powerful for you to forget to put in a configure controls option! I'm sorry for that outburst, but this really pissed me off. No keyboard config, no mouse speed, no nothing. Only an invert mouse option which, I might add, was back to front.



Is that the 'money shot'?

Before anyone writes to me calling me a 'less-than-human', I might point out that, yes, there is a .txt file allowing the controls to be reconfigured. But, you know what? That's what Bungie gets paid for. If they want me to configure their game using .txt files, perhaps I should be getting a percentage of their programmers' salary. Feh. Text files.

Oni isn't brilliant, but it's damn entertaining. And it has Konoko, who is, in essence, it's persona and driving force. It is through this central crux that Bungie have been able to deliver with force a fun, action-packed, highly irreverent formula that won't change the way you look at gaming, but will provide for more than few fun nights with a hot manga babe. And, hell, that's good enough.

Daniel Staines

PCPP

FOR

- Konoko is a babe
- Great looking
- Silly fun

AGAINST

- Less than intuitive control
- Lack of options

OVERALL

If it had the options, it would have been gold

88%

CALL TO POWER II

Remember when the map was red?

DETAILS

GENRE
Strategy

MULTIPLAYER
Yes

DEVELOPER
Activision

PUBLISHER
Activision

DISTRIBUTOR
Activision

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
GB+

NEED
P166, 64 MB RAM,
16-bit Videocard

WANT
PII-266 (needed for
multiplayer)

ONLINE

[www.activision.com/
games/ctp2/index.html](http://www.activision.com/games/ctp2/index.html)
Not the official site.
No siree!



Deeper than Risk, cheaper than Settlers of Catan, and more addictive than opium, Civilization has been a strategy favourite for the past decade. The simple premise of guiding your own tribe from the stone age to the 21st century and beyond has been implemented so elegantly by this game series that it has proven itself as an

attractive alternative lifestyle option to those who might otherwise direct their brainpower to tertiary education or leaving the house. Within the basic framework of researching new technologies and commanding mighty armies is the freedom to rule any way one chooses: Communist or capitalist, decadent or frugal, peaceful or through regular bathing in human blood.

In the wake of the first Civilization there has sprung a mighty dynasty of sequels and spin-offs, with two warring houses both claiming the right to sell the latest "Civilization" (not including the nasty little

brushfire war with the makers of the board game of the same name). Civilization and Civilization 2 were produced in the name of Sid Meier at Microprose, and his company Firaxis is presently at work on the "official" version of Civilization 3.

But before that legal right was wrangled back by his army of lawyers, Activision briefly had a window of propriety wide enough to release Civilization: Call to Power. Now all Activision has is the rights to the subtitle, but it's one worth having. Call to Power broke new ground, and its sequel follows through in a satisfactory fashion.



Call to Power's combat system is much better than Civilization's

It's time to play conquer the world

The basic formula of Civilization casts the player into the role of an immortal dictator-for-life charged with the task of spreading one's people cancer-like across the globe, overcoming a handful of like-minded opponents. CTP2 supports multiplayer, but the primary mode of play for this kind of protracted nerdity is on one's own. A whopping three different pre-programmed scenarios are supported, not including the option to play on a disproportional map of the real world.

The isometric map grid determines where you can place your cities and move your armies. As history progresses the player has greater scope to mold the natural environment, irrigating fields, laying down road and rail, and even developing the ocean floor once the game clock ticks over into the near future. Economic management is the core of play, the proportion of spending directed to research, public works and slush funds being crucial to any strategy.

As science marches forward, the player's options expand. With the development of Mass Media, for instance, one can construct Outlet Malls in one's cities, an improvement synonymous with civilised society. Most of these trickle-down effects are fairly logical,

such as the knowledge of Tank Warfare allowing the construction of Tank units. In addition to the regular lineup of civil and military paraphernalia, one can also build prestige projects that provide special game bonuses. These Wonders of the World include such pivotal human achievements as The Pyramids, Hollywood and the Zero Crime Bill, and serve to inspire as well as assist the player.

Man & Machine: Power Extreme!

Conventional warfare is resolved at the strategic level, with land, sea, air and even space units being covered through every stage of history. Terrain and troop experience affect conflict resolution, but the general rule is that the more advanced you are, the more certain your opponent's destruction. Stealth bombers could lose to phalanxes surprisingly often in the original Civilization, but the combat system has been sufficiently bolstered to make common sense a reality.

Wars can be fought by other means, such as legal assaults, religious corruption and diplomatic skullduggery. It is these methods of asymmetrical warfare that the Call to Power line has developed more fully than the original game, and the endgame has been

CIV FOR FREE? www.freeciv.org

If you were a fan of the original Civilization, and I know I am, then the option of downloading a complete and completely free version may appeal. This is no mere abandonware mirror, mind you, but a fully functional Civ clone created by fans for fans. The only catch is that it's native to unix, and while there are pre-existing builds for Windows users, Free Civ will sit better with the Linux gaming consciousness. Home-brew games like this one of course have the secret ingredient of love, making Free Civ an intoxicating treat for the fruity and the skint.

www.freeciv.org

(Can you win without the Jew?)

FreeCiv is a multiplayer strategy game, released under the GNU General Public License. It is primarily compatible with Linux, but can be ported to other operating systems.



Communists? I wonder if they have James' clothes

extended from the 21st to the 30th century. Space combat plays less of a role than in CTP1, though there are still plenty of ultra-tech units and structures to be revealed once your civ reaches the "Diamond Age."

Every base has been covered; fans of the first Call to Power will be impressed. The unit deselection bug from CTP1 has been fixed. The interface has been improved, the options expanded. Gameplay has been tweaked. It's everything a CTP fan could hope for. But old-school Civ fans may be less than impressed. Those, like one of the writers for Old Man Murray, who still plays Civ 2 because in their opinion a game has yet to surpass it - CTP included - may find it preferable to wait for the release of Civilization 3, no matter how long that takes.

Ultimately, the only thing holding back Call to Power 2 is a lack of character. In the very first Civ, the entertainers you could play your populous with looked like Elvis, there were joke newspaper headlines from throughout history, and if you played badly enough your leadership skills would be compared to those of Dan Quayle. Call to Power built on this by adding Lawyers and Televangelists to your stable of military units, but CTP2 obviously wasn't written by the same grade of Civ heads. Everything is a little dry, almost sterile. The same sense of fun wasn't put into it, and likewise it's hard to extract the same level of glee, even if you lead the illustrious Australian Empire to victory against the Americans and the English at the same time. I mean, if you can't invade New Zealand, then what's the point?

James Cottee

PCPP

FOR

- Winning formula
- Some pretty exhaustive options

AGAINST

- Flaccid look/feel
- Feels like a copy of a copy

OVERALL

This one is best prescribed for the CTP purists

78%

ALICE

Imaginative tour-de-force or Doom clone?
Step through the looking-glass and see for yourself...

DETAILS

GENRE

Old-school shooter

MULTIPLAYER

No

DEVELOPER

Rogue Entertainment

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

DISTRIBUTOR

Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

MA15

NEED

PII-500, 64MB
RAM, 16Mb 3D card

WANT

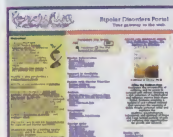
PIII-600, 128Mb RAM,
64Mb GeForce card

ONLINE

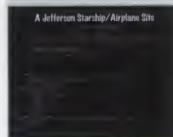
www.wonderland.com
Not interesting, except for the rumour this was actually a hardcore porn site. It isn't.



www.pendulum.org
Bipolar disorders portal! That's right, all you need to know about mental illness. It's no myth.



www.starship.pp.se
'One pill makes you larger and one pill makes you small... go ask Alice... when she's ten feet tall...'



It's Black & White - but where's the giant cow?



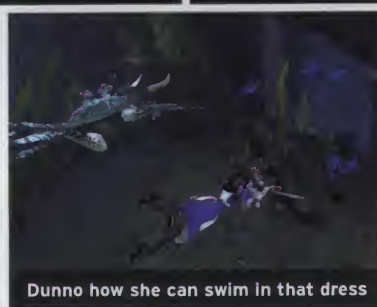
Fine and feathered it may be, but it's no friend

Unfortunately Alice is a bit of a bimbo. But not your normal, blonde-hair, big-bust bimbo. She's more of your thin, Goth kind of bimbo. There's a suggestion of sophistication, somewhere behind the pale skin and the kohl. And that's where it stays. As a suggestion, as Alice is a straight shooter, nearly as basic as Doom.

The game has an elegant and simple concept: Alice, now aged sixteen, has spent the last eight years in an asylum following the death of her parents in a house fire. Lost deep within her own mind, she is brought back to Wonderland, only to find it overrun by evil and decay, locked in the iron grip of the Queen of Hearts.

Damaged mind

Level design sets Alice apart from all other games. American McGee, late of id software, has expertly created the landscape of a damaged mind. Every level is memorable. Ruined masonry juts over howling maelstroms. A derelict schoolhouse rocks gently over a yawning chasm. Ice caves give way to sunken villages and castles. Giant broken watches hang over Escher-like stairs and corridors. Alice is where level building becomes an art-



Dunno how she can swim in that dress

form. Play Alice for a couple of hours, and when you return to another FPS game, such as Quake 3 itself, the levels will seem still and static. Everything in Alice moves. Lamps swing, loose bricks shift, strange machines belch smoke and ash, hands spin around clock faces and pipes rattle and clang. The world of Alice is very much alive.

But while the levels suggest immersive gameplay, like the Goth bimbo, Alice is a bit brain-dead. She's a shooter, a straight, no-nonsense shooter. Alice runs through corridors, opens doors, bounces through teleporters, collects health, mana and weapons, and shoots things that jump out at her.

There are a variety of enemies, all excellently modelled and animated, and

they have a wide range of different attacks, suggesting excellent AI and a combat experience like no other. Unfortunately - again - bimbo-style, these enemies are dumb. They just fly or crawl or ooze toward you shooting their ranged weapons until you get in range of their melee weapons, or until you kill them. They even get stuck on stairs and tricky corners, treadmilling into oblivion.

Likewise, while Alice's own weapons are original in appearance and operation, the suggestion of innovation isn't realised. Her basic knife is a melee weapon that can be thrown. The deck of cards functions as a rapid-fire machine gun or a shotgun. The croquet mallet works like a weak rocket launcher or a more powerful melee weapon. The jacks are like the hive-arm from Half-Life, and the blunderbuss works exactly like the BFG.

Through the looking glass

But does less-than-innovative gameplay ruin the game? Not quite. Alice is a journey through a broken, oppressed Wonderland. Even though the game's a straight shooter, there's constant variety in environments and enemies.

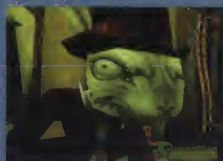


CAUCUS RACE - A CAST OF DOZENS

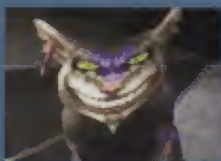
For fans and MA English postgraduates, part of the charm of Alice is meeting all your old favourites from the books. Here's a selection...



ALICE
Now sixteen and catatonic in a mental ward. Strangely, while Alice looks and has been hyped as psycho, she still speaks like a demure English girl just back from prep school. But then she gets the knife out...



WHITE RABBIT
Eight years after the very important date for which he was so late, the White Rabbit has obviously been abusing the substances to which Jefferson Airplane alluded in their song of the same name. Permanently bent.



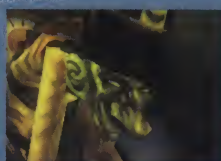
CHESHIRE CAT
Ostensibly Alice's mentor and guide, the cat appears at frequent intervals offering smartarsed, cryptic advice. Do not approach the glass. Do not offer him anything or accept any item from him...



MOCK TURTLE
Like an engineering student, the Mock Turtle is part man, part cow and part disgusting slimy creature.



GRYPHON
Alice's champion and the only character with an American accent. 'I'll meet you later in Queensland!' he cries at one point. Which is kind of funny.



MAD HATTER
He's really bad.

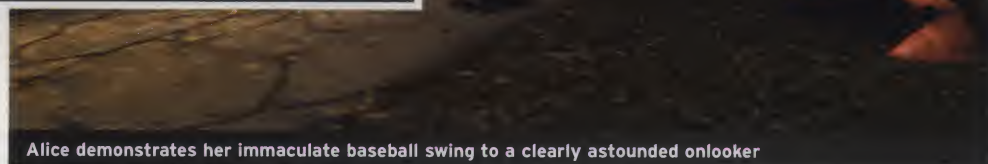


These guys obviously wear their heart on their sleeve... or something

There is also a story, which is implemented fairly well. The Cheshire Cat, who does an excellent impression of Anthony Hopkins' Hannibal Lector, guides Alice through Wonderland. As she travels, she meets each of the characters from the original books, and finds their own personal worlds turned upside down or disturbed in some way. The fate of the March Hare and the Dormouse is particularly horrible.

And here's where the game strikes another problem. American McGee and his team assume a great deal of knowledge of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass. The characters, who all look great and are voiced really well, all seem to assume Alice knows who they are, which is probably fair enough, but a little bit more background wouldn't have gone amiss.

So the characters suggest in-depth NPC action, conversation and roleplaying. But no. Character interaction is limited. There are no dialogue options; the game decides whom you will talk to and when you will talk to them. When a conversation point is reached, the game switches to a letterbox-format cutscene, seriously disrupting the flow of the



Alice demonstrates her immaculate baseball swing to a clearly astounded onlooker

action. The Quake 3 engine is also clearly not happy running a singleplayer game. Unlike Half-Life, for instance, where all game areas blend together, there is an end-of-level screen - just like in the original Doom - where a map of Wonderland is slowly unfolded as the next area loads.

Suggestive showdowns

When you're actually in the level though, there are no complaints at all. Alice has an almost perfect shooter interface, which suggests she's almost the perfect shooter. The health and mana bars are unobtrusive, but easy to read. The weapon display shows everything it has to and nothing more. And Rogue Entertainment has finally designed a thirdperson camera that works. You have to look straight down at Alice's feet to get any sort of clipping or distortion, and Alice is always visible, never stuck behind walls, enemies or other objects. Good work, but

perfect? Well, she plays like Doom, so like all bimbos, Alice thinks copying your best friend is the best route to success.

Finally, at well-paced intervals, Alice will enter a huge arena and face an enormous boss creature. From the Duchess and her pepperpot to a giant Centipede, from the Red King to the Mad Hatter, all make appearances as end-of-area bosses. And of course, lurking in the shadows, the Jabberwock itself guards the Queen of Hearts and Alice's ultimate goal. It's all very suggestive.

But when you pin her down and tell her what's what, Alice is just a straight shooter with a linear story. Is Alice a disappointment? She looks good. She sounds good. But when it comes to action - and you know what I'm talking about - you're left feeling hollow. She could have been so much more. Love her in your own quiet way, sure. But don't introduce her to your friends. That way lies madness.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

FOR

- Best levels ever
- Great characters
- Clean interface

AGAINST

- Straight shooter
- Story on rails
- Limited replay

OVERALL

Suggestive of excellence, but only really so-so

83%

DELTA FORCE LAND WARRIOR

For the third time, Novalogic almost gets it right...

DETAILS

GENRE

Infantry Combat Sim

MULTIPLAYER

Yes (1-50 TCP/IP, LAN)

DEVELOPER

Novalogic

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

DISTRIBUTOR

Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

M

NEED

PII-400, 64Mb
RAM, 200 Mb HDD

WANT

PIII-600, 128Mb
RAM, 32Mb 3D
Videocard

ONLINE

www.novalogic.com

The forum at this official site is a good place to talk to people about the game and to check out other player's custom missions



www.hants.gov.uk/leisure/museums/lightinf/index.html

The website of an infantry museum in the UK. Check out infantry warfare history and what came before the Land Warrior concept



They'll never notice me hiding next to this fireballing car

Some time ago the US military realised that it was going to need a new kind of soldier to cope with the demands of future warfare. He would have to be tanned and ruggedly good looking to make the most of any photo opportunities and TV interviews. He would also have the ability to fire hundreds of rounds from a clip designed only for 30.

Direct hits from anything up to 20mm bore automatic weapons will only leave a small crimson blotch on his singlet. Most importantly, he must have the ability to accurately hurl one-liners at the enemy from 300 metres, preferably something about Saddam Hussein's penchant for mating with camels. This would be the Land Warrior.

From a design point of view, Novalogic didn't have to modify Delta Force 2 that much to get to Land Warrior. This third instalment is a gentle evolution of the product rather than a massive redesign.

Before Team Fortress and Counter-Strike, Rainbow Six and SWAT 3, Delta Force captured the energy and excitement of tactical, open terrain warfare with realistic weaponry and lethality (ie. you can get killed by one bullet). It soon became an online favourite among players bored with the monotony of Quake



You don't even notice the voxels



Ho-hum, more explosions

and Unreal, and among international players impressed with Novaworld's (the developer's dedicated game server) ability to run with relatively low lag.

Novalogic has used a voxel-based engine in the game's previous incarnation in order to get PC's to render the vast open spaces it required without slowing down. Land Warrior still uses voxel mathematics to draw the framework of the terrain, but the new hybrid engine then covers that frame with traditional texture bitmaps that allow the use of 3D accelerator cards and higher resolutions than before.

New Toys

Land Warrior introduces a host of new weapons that increase the options available to the player. The FN-MAG provides a more

powerful alternative to the classic SAW, while the G11, O1CW and Steyr assault rifles give the player more flexibility with their varied rates of fire, recoil and ammo capacity. Scuba divers are well catered for with a new underwater kit that helps them stay underwater longer and snipers have the PSG-1, a silenced short range rifle useful in the singleplayer missions, bank queues and the Aria awards but not that effective in multiplayer games.

Another new feature is the ability to use fixed emplacements such as .50 calibre machine guns and condom vending machines, although they make you a sitting duck for snipers in a multiplayer game. Budding level designers should note the new mission editor as well, for the first time players can design their own mission maps and swap with friends.



Tanks for the weapon update!



A modern day gargyle



Frag that camper!



Bless the sniper rifle

VIRTUAL REALITY

In yet another case of life imitating art, or in this case games, the US Army has actually used the Land Warrior engine to create real training systems for its soldiers. The Army chose NovaLogic to create the training software because Delta Force 2 already contained many elements the simulation needed: the ability to render vast outdoor terrain as well as indoor and urban settings; support for as many as 50 users in a single scenario; varied weather conditions; map displays; night vision; a large array of real-world weapons, and a full-featured mission editor, and lots of newbies to bastardise.



There are also some enhancements to the soldiers in the form of more realistic roleplaying. There are several different 'types' to choose from: Sniper, Grenadier, Gunner, Medic and Close Quarters. The Sniper, for example, can belly crawl faster than anyone, while the Gunner experiences less recoil with heavy guns and does a lot better with the native girls after hours.

Online Still The Way To Go

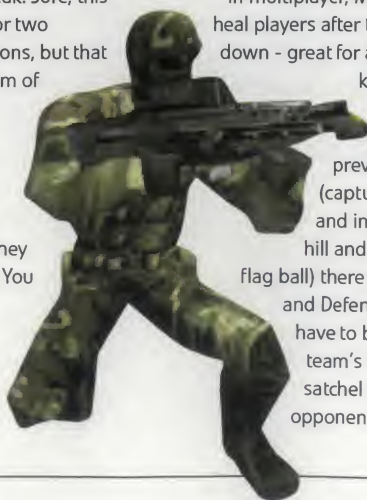
Even with all these new features, Land Warrior still suffers from the same problem that has dogged the Delta Force series from day one. The singleplayer game is weak. Sure, this time you have a teammate or two helping out in the solo missions, but that doesn't solve the real problem of the woeful AI.

The bad guys in Land Warrior are exactly the kind you'd want to meet if you were ever in a similar situation. They look dumb, they act dumb... they are dumb! You can shoot one of two guys standing together and the other one will simply kneel down, scratch himself or start reading the form

guide. Cranking the difficulty up simply puts more dumb guys out there on the theory that ten idiots are more formidable than five idiots, which is probably only accurate when you're talking about mud wrestling.

As a result, Novaworld is really the only way to go. Though the game servers reside in the US, if you choose your time carefully you can play with an acceptable level of lag. Still a remarkable feat after all these years. Of course, if you can get a group together you can organise a more local match-up by hosting it yourself or go for the LAN option for the best performance.

In multiplayer, Medic characters can heal players after they've been taken down - great for avoiding kills and keeping those stats in good shape. In addition to the previous game types (capture the flag, team and individual king of the hill and deathmatch, and flag ball) there is a new one, Attack and Defend, in which players have to blow up the enemy team's buildings with satchel charges before their opponent does likewise.



"Could you make your jaw any squarer?"

PCPP

FOR

- Best simulation of open-air warfare
- Vast environs
- Great multiplayer

AGAINST

- Singleplayer is hardly worthwhile
- Indoor environs not handled very well by engine

OVERALL

While superb online, a better solo game would have resulted in a better score

75%

George Soropos

FUR FIGHTERS

Get in touch with your inner-child and blow some teddy-bear's head off

DETAILS

GENRE

Action/Adventure

MULTIPLAYER

Yes (LAN, TCP/IP)

DEVELOPER

Bizarre Creations

PUBLISHER

Acclaim

DISTRIBUTOR

Acclaim

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

M

NEED

PII-300, 32MB RAM,
16MB 3D Videocard

WANT

PIII-500, 64MB RAM

ONLINE

[www.acclaim.com/
games/furfighters/](http://www.acclaim.com/games/furfighters/)
Zzzzzzz...
Zzzzz...



www.teddybears.org
Everything you could ever want to know about teddy bears. More than 12,000 people have visited this site. Oh Gawd.



www.secretgully.com.au
A definitive source of Aussie soft-toys.



"Right, hand over all your kitty litter. This is a stick up!"

Who would have thought that a crusty old bugger like myself would have enjoyed a kid's game? Yet I did, for a lot of reasons. **Fur Fighters is fast and decently challenging, it looks good, smells great and plays smoothly, but most importantly, it's funny as hell.**

Shadowman, the last foray Acclaim made into the action/adventure sub-genre was a criminally underrated game. Even PCPP gave it what I considered an unfair mark (*An unkind mark maybe, but definitely fair - Ed*). With this in mind, when I was informed I would be given the next game by that publisher, my reaction was one of great joy. Until I was told it was a kid's game. Wherefore the screaming pig souls and bodies gutted on hooks, wherefore the eerie wailing voodoo spirits? Fur Fighters?! Why not just let me review Spyro the bloody Dragon? I like my games pants-wetting and scary.

Reluctantly, I installed. But to my surprise, I was met by a dog with a pistol and a thick Scottish accent. As his old enemy took his children, he raged at the skies and swore vengeance.

War and peace

As always, the plot is pretty basic. After a bunch of maddening wars, the Fur Fighters retired to lives of peace. They had kids and left the bad old days behind them. But now an enemy from the past, the brutal General Viggo, has returned and they must hunt this draconian villain down and retake the children he has kidnapped. There is a term in wrestling called kayfabe, where you never admit it's fake. This is where

Fur Fighters works so well. It never breaks kayfabe that the furry little cute critters are in fact dangerous, bad minded, battle

scarred warriors. They swear, have bad habits and a ruthless warrior rage, and they do it all in cute nonsensical voices and with plush happy little faces. It's an odd mix; Fur Fighters looks like a kid game, it sounds like one, but has a core of darker grown up humour to it.

The player takes on six different roles during the game, utilising the various skills of each character. The dog, Rufus, is the only Fighter who can dig. Juliette the cat, factional foe of Rufus, is the only one who can climb walls. Bungalow, a Kangaroo, can jump double heights and, in a typical British swipe against us Aussies, he's very stupid. Tweak the baby dragon has the ability to glide. Rico is a Penguin and the only swimming Fighter. Chang is a red Panda that is smaller than the others and thus able to get into areas they can't. The game environment is cleverly tailored to use multiple characters and keeps the action from getting stale. The little beasts are animated wonderfully with many little motions and tics to give them charm and character. In addition, the audio is a subtle high point, with lots of amusing grunts, cheeps, meows and gunshots.





Cramped combat

The game is a third-person shooter, with mouse and keyboard controls. It's not a style the younger audience may be comfortable using, as it does require fairly sophisticated co-ordination, once again suggesting this is not really a kids game at all.

In the large play environments are a large number of enemies, all of whom use basic but effective AI to flank and hunt you. Stupid Bears are easiest to deal with, but in later levels, the cramped environments and number of enemies keep the challenge fresh. Combat is really rather fine, with a large number of big guns in the hands of small, cute and violently unpredictable characters that change with pleasing regularity.

But it's not like any first or thirdperson shooter either. Fur Fighters incorporates some elements of thirdperson action, FPS and even the time-honoured platformer and rolls them all expertly into one. Then chuck in some puzzles as well and you get something that's pretty hard to wedge into a single genre.



Hilarious

The environments are chock full of in-jokes (New Quack City, for instance), are expansive, and always look amazing. A lot of the size and aesthetics of the game seems to be achieved with clever use of light and shadow, but don't let that put you off. Again, animation is superb.

Enjoyable as it all is, Fur Fighters has its share of faults. Forcing the game into the third-person perspective really detracts, as the camera angle often changes to tight eye-level shots. Indeed, the character occasionally fills the screen, inhibits aiming

and obstructs the view of the enemies.

There are also a number of precise jumping areas, where these tight angles are knuckle-grindingly frustrating. In certain areas, it's so bad play grinds to a halt. You want to play but why bother when taking one leap takes seven tries? And there's a ten step leaping sequence.

Fur Fighters is a great game. It's fun, it's silly, it's got big dumb guns, great looking levels and interesting puzzles. It's not a kid's game, but it's in contact with an inner-child. It's full of personality. But the free floating camera trips it up and puts a big hit on enjoyment. Also, the cuteness can wear off, especially on bad hair days. Fur Fighters is dumb, but endearingly dumb. Don't let the kiddie-style put you off.

Christian Read

PCPP

FOR

- Great level design
- Humour works
- Very cute animals, big guns

AGAINST

- Camera nightmare
- Often too cute

OVERALL

Endearing soft-toy violence let down by dodgy camera-work

73%

FURRY FRIENDS



Meet RUFUS, the loveable Scottish Hard Bastard Dog.



JULIETTE The French Femme-Fatale, who shares an uneasy alliance with her canine leader.



CHANG the Chinese Penguin is highly insane.



TWEAK the Dragon is two days old and stupid but not as stupid as...



BUNGALOW the Kangaroo, who is stereotyped as moronic by jealous pale English game designers.



RICO the penguin is just plain weird.

SCREAMER 4x4

Offroad racing that's a bit off

DETAILS

GENRE

Arcade Racing

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Clever

PUBLISHER

Virgin Interactive

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

G

NEED

P200, 32 Mb RAM,
4 Mb 3D Card

WANT

PII400, 64Mb RAM,
32 Mb TNT/GeForce



It's a real job introducing a game like this. A game that, although not too bad, brings nothing at all original or interesting to the table and is only for people who, as your mother might say, "like that sort of thing".

Screamer 4x4 - what good can be said about it? Not much. The graphics are standard, the engine is less than exciting, and the sound... well, thank God for the mute button. However, I'm going to be fair and let you decide if it's your type of game. Below you'll find a short question with the corresponding answers. Choose one to



ascertain the probability of liking Screamer 4x4. Driving a 4x4 through flags in the bush makes me:

- A) Feel giddy with delight.
- B) Feel somewhat bored.
- C) Feel like punching my monitor then throwing it at a stranger... and then punching the stranger.

If you answered 'A' to the above, then great, Screamer just might be your type of game. Bs are a little ambivalent about the matter and should probably stick to Monster Truck Madness or something similar. However, if 'C' was more to your



liking then... well, I think it's pretty obvious that you will not like Clever's efforts because what I described in the question is basically what Screamer consists of. There are much better racing games out there, and if you don't already own them, don't spend your money on this instead.

Daniel Staines

PCPP

OVERALL

I chose answer 'C',
by the way

59%

F1 SEASON 2000

A seasonal update

DETAILS

GENRE

Racing

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Redux

PUBLISHER

EA Sports

DISTRIBUTOR

Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

G

NEED

PII-266, 64Mb RAM

WANT

PIII-500, 128Mb
RAM, 3D Videocard

F1 2000 is not a new game. Don't let the shiny box or shrink wrap fool you, that's just a clever disguise. You see, F1 2000 is in actual fact the '80s arcade racer, Pole Position.

This may sound a little weird, but just listen for a sec. F1 2000... it's like those old people who drink Pepsi and ride Harleys. You know the type that I'm talking about: they are always out on the street wearing cargo pants and listening to Eminem while people are shaking their heads at them. Shaking their heads because under all the cool threads and what-not, they're still, well, old people.

It's the same with F1 2000. Admittedly, the game has snazzy graphics, fuzzy commentary and some purely aesthetic weather conditions, but so what? That just means that it's Pole Position with extra rain and fog. The physics engine, though far more advanced, plays almost exactly the same



It's pretty, but this is no Grand Prix 3

as an old school racer; ridiculously high-speed crashes end in little more than a slight turn around for your vehicle. Hell, if you'd played this game with a steering wheel, you'd be forgiven for waiting for an 'Insert Coin' message to come up.

However, F1 2000 isn't a bad game. You've just got to look at it from the right angle.

Instead of calling it "dated and shallow", you could call it "nostalgic and silly" because that's what it is in the right hands. It's all a matter of perspective. Usually thirdperson, mind you.

Daniel Staines

PCPP

OVERALL

F1 Season 2000 is
an old game in new
clothes, but it's
still fun

67%

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

Grinding the competition into the dirt



DETAILS

GENRE

Extreme Sports

MULTIPLAYER

Yes (1-2, TCP/IP, Hotseat)

DEVELOPER

Neversoft

PUBLISHER

Activision

DISTRIBUTOR

Activision

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

G8

NEED

PII-300, 32MB RAM, Win 95/98, 450MB HDD, 3D Videocard

WANT

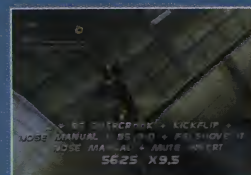
PII-450, 64MB RAM



Tony checks to see if his board's still there

THE ART OF THE COMBO...

Stringing together tricks to form extended combos is a must in Tony Hawk 2. Unlike the original, this time around, you can make use of manuals (a ground trick) to string your other tricks together. You could do a jump and a kick flip, then land in a manual, jump to a grind, to a manual, to a ramp and another aerial trick. In this way, the possibilities for high scoring combos are almost endless.



Tony Hawk? Doesn't sound like a PC game, does it? Put your cynicism to one side for a moment and consider the possibilities of true freedom with a reasonable piece of wood beneath your feet.

This game is compelling, and that's a pretty silly thing to be saying about a skateboarding game. Well, isn't it? Usually, yes, but this time definitely not. Tony Hawk 2 is compelling gaming. Let me count the ways: at its most basic level, it's about speed and skill. Here is the opportunity to try your hand ("Foot", surely? - Ed) at some of the most incredible moves a skateboarder can (and at times couldn't possibly) pull off.

The game offers a number of gameplay options, but the meat of the package is certainly the career mode. This is where you earn dollars, enter competitions, upgrade your skills and deck, unlock parks and find secrets. The skate parks are varied, from a school to New York City, a Mexican Bullring to outer space! The levels are large and cleverly designed, with some great hidden areas. Often you will see a cash icon on a roof somewhere and think, "Damn, how do I get up there?"



That looks really painful

Token grind

Like all great capitalist ventures, the aim of career mode is to earn money - to upgrade your skills, your board and to enter competitions. Each level sets numerous tasks that earn you a certain amount of money. It could be collecting a number of tokens around the park, grinding a particular section of the course or achieving a particular high score. The tasks are very different, requiring different styles of skating. You might need to race around madly to reach an item for a task. Another you might need to carefully line up a jump because there's something you need over the gap. It's challenging and super fun.

The soundtrack kicks with a good blend of hip hop and rock tracks including Public Enemy, Papa Roach, Mos Def, Bad Religion and Millencolin (who give a killer track!).



That looks like it's going to be really painful

There's a good amount of humour in the form of backchat from motorists and lively commentary. The menu interface can be cumbersome, but for the most part this is wonderfully transparent gameplay - no messing about, just easy access, fast riding, good-natured fun.

This is an impressive port of an essentially console experience and it is a joy to play. Is it the speed? The opportunity to do that which is humanly impossible? The music, the personality? All of these things. Tony Hawk 2 is entirely essential if you have even a passing interest in showing off on a skateboard. Wonderful, wonderful gaming.

John Dewhurst

PCPP

OVERALL

The greatest PC skating experience bar none

92%

CLOSE COMBAT

Subtitled Invasion Normandy

DETAILS

GENRE

Strategy

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Atomic Games

PUBLISHER

SSI/The Learning Co

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

M

NEED

P-200, 32MB RAM,
150MB HD, 4MB
Videocard

WANT

P11, 64MB RAM

Close Combat was the first real stab at non turn-based historical tactical wargaming. Each of its successors continued in the same vein, with minor improvements, although Close Combat 2: Operation Market-Garden is generally regarded as the high point of the series. Invasion Normandy, the fifth and probably final instalment, successfully builds on that experience to present an excellent representation of the American drive from Utah Beach to Cherbourg.

Invasion Normandy offers 44 single player missions, 4 Campaigns, 7 Operations (virtually miniature campaigns) and online play via modem, MS Zone and Mplayer. Play is fast and furious, with an emphasis on infantry action, and victory is determined by a combination of time limits, morale and the control of key terrain. A straightforward Scenario Editor also enables players to design their own Operations and Campaigns, with access to a variety of units that were not historically available to the combatants.



"We'll fight them on the beaches...!" Etc

Whilst Invasion Normandy might seem dated by today's standards, players need to look closer than the top-down graphics. This is a realtime strategy game that actually gives you the chance to coordinate your forces, and punishes you severely for failing to employ appropriate tactics. Soldiers behave realistically, with squads supporting each other in an intelligent fashion, but local failures will see a gradual deterioration in overall force morale - your brilliant plan will

not achieve much if your shell-shocked troops refuse to obey their orders.

Close Combat is the best in the series, and its venerable game engine still has a lot to offer would-be Eisenhowers.

Major Des McNicholas

PCPP

OVERALL

The 5th & best in a great series, offering fast paced realistic tactical action

85%

PANZER GENERAL III

Subtitled Scorched Earth. Geez these wargames have long names

DETAILS

GENRE

Strategy

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

SSI

PUBLISHER

SSI/The Learning Co

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

M

NEED

P11-266, 32MB RAM,
400MB HD, 8MB 3D
Videocard

WANT

64MB RAM



Funny hat? Check



Tanks? Check



Explosions? Check

Panzer General III: Scorched Earth is actually the fourth title in this famous series, preceded in 1999 by Panzer General 3D Assault. It's essentially the same game moved to Russia, bringing new units, a Battle Generator, and a 2D Strategy Map to aid with planning and situational awareness.

The 3D effects are on par with 3D Assault, with the wide expanses of Russia offering some interesting terrain to fight over. 20 single player missions are included, but the heart of the game lies in

the four campaigns based on the careers of key generals.

Play in Scorched Earth is simple and fast, in keeping with its boardgame

origins. The tutorial is excellent, and players will master the interface very quickly. Battles are abstract rather than realistic, something akin to chess, although it makes a reasonable fist of capturing the feel of war on the Russian Front. Planning plays a rather large role in success, especially in the selection of leaders. However, I found some

aspects of the setup to be rather frustrating, particularly the very pretty (but ultimately very clumsy) Headquarters Screen.

Scorched Earth offers both simple gameplay and a surprising degree of strategic depth for those seeking a more cerebral experience.

Major Des McNicholas

PCPP

OVERALL

Not for owners of 3D Assault, but it's got a great intro for newcomers

72%

RESIDENT EVIL 3

Subtitled Nemesis

DETAILS

GENRE
Action/Adventure

MULTIPLAYER
No

DEVELOPER
Capcom

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DISTRIBUTOR
Ozisoft

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
MA15

NEED
P-233, 64MB RAM

WANT
PII-400, 128MB
RAM, 3D Videocard



Shooting enemies you can't see. Tsk



Ooh, are there any Templar Knights?

David and I haggled over the size of this review. I wanted at least a page and he wouldn't budge from this. I argued the PSX version was a great game and he pointed out the low resolution and sloppy loading times. I really like Capcom, he expressed ambivalence. There is no prize for guessing who won out in the end.

However, after getting down and playing Nemesis on the PC, I'm inclined to concur with the editor-daddy on this one. In case you didn't know, RE is a survival horror action series revolving around - surprise - surviving horror. You survive horror by running from it or shooting it in the head

repeatedly with big guns. This formula has been repeated - some say ad nauseam - in almost every RE game, including Nemesis. Does Nemesis do it well? Yes and no.

On the PSX Nemesis was a great game. All the scary bits were timed right and, aside from fiddly controls and stupid item boxes, it was a great example of how to make an intense game. This has been faithfully recreated on the PC. But, and here's the 'no' part, a little too faithfully. Aside from the ability to beef the resolution, Nemesis PC is nothing if not a rushed port. All the flaws, quibbles and loading screens from the PSX remain. How sad.

Daniel Staines

PCPP

OVERALL
Good zombie killin' fun. But it's not that good...

63%



KISS PINBALL

Lock Balls with Gene's tongue!

DETAILS

GENRE
Ageing-rock pinball

MULTIPLAYER
No

DEVELOPER
Wildfire Studios

PUBLISHER
Take Two

DISTRIBUTOR
Jack of all Games

AVAILABLE
Now

RATING
G

NEED
P-233, 32Mb RAM

WANT
P-233, 32Mb RAM

This is a KISS pinball game. It has pinball and KISS. With that out of the way, what else can we talk about?

This game is much better than KISS: Psycho Circus, the Nightmare Child because it actually has quite a lot of KISS in it. KISS: PC, TNC copped a lot of flak because sure, it had a lot of stuff from the KISS comic, but what people really wanted was KISS. The comic may have had some of the actual blood of KISS mixed in with the ink, but it was all about some nightmare and some child, not about KISS. There just wasn't enough KISS.

Now KISS Pinball fills that void, because it has KISS. You can shoot your balls around two tables chock full of KISS. You will know they are KISS tables because they have pictures of KISS on them. Also, the word KISS is written on the tables. As well as KISS branding on the tables, there's an amusingly animated dotpanel that also has a lot of KISS branding. It also has skeletons and electric guitars and other things we have come to associate with KISS.



Stop playing that damn soundtrack, more like

On one table, you have to help KISS escape from the netherworld... or you have to escape from KISS who are the netherworld... or something, it's not really clear. The other table is better, because you play a rock fan who wants to go and see KISS. I didn't touch any of the controls on this one, I just let ever ball fall through the... bit that the ball falls through (I don't play much pinball). So if you want KISS and pinball, then KISS Pinball is

definitely for you. If you don't want KISS or pinball, then it probably isn't. If you want pinball and don't mind the KISS one way or the other, don't get this because it's a crap pinball game.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

OVERALL
Kiss this...

22%

ZEUS

A little blokes game



DETAILS

GENRE

Management

MULTIPLAYER

No

DEVELOPER

Impression Games

PUBLISHER

Sierra

DISTRIBUTOR

Jack of All Games

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

G8

NEED

P166, 32 Mb RAM, 2 Mb Video Card

WANT

P300, 64 Mb RAM



Bloody thespians, think they own the place



Hmm, isn't this the same screenshot, only slightly to the right...

People - they always complain. Everything's just whinge and moan. They complain about the weather, they complain about their neighbours and most notably they complain about the government. Why, the plebians in my city-state have done nothing but whine and moan since the great water and olive oil shortage of '79. Well, that is, they were whining... until I sent around my armed garrison to chop their heads off. Nothing says "Stop whining!" quite like a short sword in the face.

Of course, I could have treated them fair and all that, but bugger it. This is Zeus's Greece where a despot can treat his citizens anyway he chooses. If I wanted to supply them with all the necessary commodities through an easily manageable and intuitive resource system, then I would have done it, by Hermes. If I'd so desired to keep my denizens happy by partaking in a thoroughly addictive procedure of good governance coupled with expansionist policy, then by the beard of Hades I should have done so! But no, not me. A good government is a strong government, and people can't say

otherwise with a javelin down their throats. You may look at my kingdom and comment that it could be prettier, but for what it is, it is entirely suitable. If you disagree then let me introduce you to my very good, and very armed, friends over here...

Daniel Staines

PCPP

OVERALL

The best in the series, but nothing really new

91%

GALAGA

How do YOU pronounce it?

DETAILS

GENRE

Arcade Classic

MULTIPLAYER

Hell no

DEVELOPER

Hasbro

PUBLISHER

Hasbro

DISTRIBUTOR

Hasbro

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

G

NEED

PII-350, 32Mb RAM, 3D videocard

WANT

PIII-450, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D videocard

Forget the game, what about the title? Ever since this colourful little box came into the PC Powerplay office, there have been bitter, angry fights about how to pronounce 'Galaga'. See, our glorious editor prefers to think "It's a galactic SAGA, so therefore it's Gal-AH-ger." Whereas I prefer to think "It's a GALACTIC saga, so therefore for it's GALLA-ga." The war continues.

Meanwhile, the game remains a traditional, Space Invaders style shoot-em-up, true to the memory of its 1981 predecessor. Galaga was, for many, the superior arcade box, mostly because of its ubiquitous presence at 10-pin bowling alleys and roller-skating rinks - where we spent most of the eighties - and partly because it had capture ships. They capture your fighter and use it against you, but if you shot the capture ship, your fighter would return, and you'd get DOUBLE FIREPOWER!

That is about the absolute extent of strategy in Galaga. You can also capture some of the alien ships, briefly adding an extra fireball to your blistering array of



The Afterburner bit - not real Galaga

Swirly aliens chasing their tales

death TM. The game uses only three viewpoints, top-down, side-on and over-the-shoulder-3D. While the top-down and side-on views are most reminiscent of the arcades, the developers seem much too fond of the over-the-shoulder-3D, so mostly the game plays like Afterburner rather than Galaga.

But who cares! Sure, there's not much variety or... anything really, but it's fun. Great office game. Sure to piss the boss off. What's that Ed? Yes, GALLA-ga! Eat flaming death you gravy-sucking pig!

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

OVERALL

Galla-ga, Galla-ga, Galla-ga, damn you for God's sake

64%

BATTLE ISLE THE ANDOSIA WAR

Hey, it's a wargame we didn't have to put the subtitle here for!

DETAILS

GENRE

Strategy

MULTIPLAYER

Yes (1-8)

DEVELOPER

Cauldron

PUBLISHER

Blue Byte Software

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

G

NEED

PII-300, 64MB RAM,
350MB HD

WANT

PIII-450



Soldiers on parade. Look how well they've ironed their uniforms



Now there's an inobtrusive menu



Lordy, ain't it pretty?

ONLINE

www.battleisle.com
It's the bloody
official site, okay?



Battle Isle: The Andosia War is the latest offering in the landmark Battle Isle series. Building on the 3D technology introduced in Incubation (84% PCPP#19), it seeks to "combine turn-based and realtime elements in an altogether new form of game." Blue Byte Software's success in achieving that goal is debatable, but the key question is whether such an approach makes for a good game. With The Andosia War, the answer is a definite maybe.

No man is an island

The Andosia War (think presidential campaign with guns) is fought on various Battle Islands, with both sides supplying the fighting troops from the relative safety of their respective Economic Islands. Two singleplayer campaigns are available, supported by some average tutorials, a comprehensive but poorly structured manual, and well presented cartoon-style cutscenes. Surprisingly, multiplay is restricted to LAN or Blue Byte's own Game Channel (BBGC), a decision which may

reduce the game's broader appeal. The BBGC interface is smart and straightforward, although I found only limited interest from players, despite the fact that the game had been released for several weeks at the time of writing.

Blue Byte employs a timed turn-based interface on the Battle Islands, while traditional RTS activities (resource collection, research, manufacturing) are completed in realtime on the Economic Islands. The clock starts ticking at the commencement of each turn, during which time units can be moved, weapons fired, and reinforcements

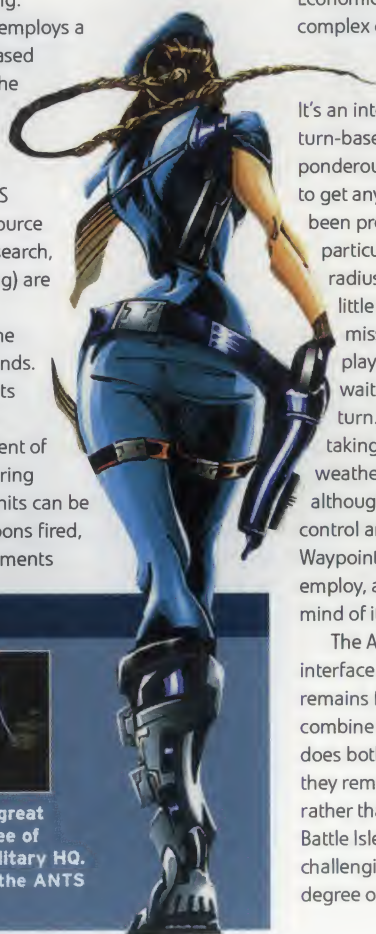
dispatched. Once time is up, the opponent goes through the same process, while the first player continues with economic activity. Once both sides have built up large forces, the time limit and the need to defend the Economic Islands from raids make for some complex challenges.

Camera obscura

It's an interesting approach, but the mix of turn-based and RTS play does get a little ponderous. Units expend AP (Action Points) to get anything done, and the developer has been pretty miserly in allocating them. In particular, the post-firing movement radius seem limited, resulting in very little progress in the early stages of a mission. And as the game moves on, players spend a lot of time simply waiting for the enemy to complete its turn. The time can certainly be used taking in the stunning 3D effects (the weather modelling is unbelievable!), although players will find aspects of the control and camera interface quite clumsy. Waypoints are especially confusing to employ, and the camera seems to have a mind of its own at times.

The Andosia War offers an innovative interface and superb graphics, but at heart it remains fairly standard fare. In seeking to combine RTS and turn-based elements it does both well, but neither brilliantly, and they remain discrete aspects of the game rather than providing a unified interface. Battle Isle: The Andosia War is a complex and challenging game in its own right, but the degree of innovation has been over-hyped.

Major Des McNicholas



PCPP

OVERALL

A great looking game
that doesn't quite
deliver on the hype

76%

FEELING ENERGETIC?



The need to maintain an unbroken power supply offers a great challenge in The Andosia War, adding an uncommon degree of complexity to the strategy format. It all starts with a Military HQ. Plug in some ERPs (Energy Relay Posts), and then send the ANTS into action. We're talking serious power bills!

RAINBOW SIX COVERT OPS ESSENTIALS

Tom Clancy is re-released into the wild

DETAILS

GENRE

Tactical Shooter

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DEVELOPER

Red Storm

PUBLISHER

Red Storm

DISTRIBUTOR

Ubi Soft

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

MA15

NEED

P-266, 64Mb RAM, 500Mb HDD

WANT

P11-350, 128Mb RAM, 3D Videocard



How not to be seen: 1. Run and hide



2. Do not stand up



3. Always carry a gun

Covert Ops Essentials isn't yet another expansion pack for the venerable *Rogue Spear*. Instead, it is a peculiar conglomeration of new missions and reference material, spread across two CDs. The box claims that *Covert Ops* contains nine new missions, but this isn't entirely true. What *Covert Ops* really offers is three new singleplayer missions and six tiny training missions. The first of the three missions is set in the jungle, and will challenge even the most hardened *Rogue Spear* veterans. The other two missions occur in an Arctic research station and a North Dakota missile silo, and are markedly easier than the jungle mission.

The training missions are set in diverse locations like trailer parks and hospital wards, but are useless to all but *Rainbow Six* newcomers. Their inclusion is perplexing, if not a little misguided, given that the product is obviously aimed at die hard fans of the series. The reference CD, on the other hand, is an absolute gem. Although the interface is less than intuitive, the information contained within will have special forces buffs salivating. Of particular note are the video sequences depicting special forces operatives training in killhouses, and demonstrations of the various weapons used by *Rainbow*. There are even interviews with learned scholars on topics like hostage negotiation and

intelligence gathering, and Clancy himself makes more than a few appearances.

From a gameplay perspective, *Covert Ops Essentials* lacks anything to justify its purchase, but as a comprehensive source of information on anything from operational tactics to the history of many of the world's best known anti-terrorism organisations, it's well worth a look.

Brett Robinson

PCPP

OVERALL

Better as an encyclopaedia than as a game

69%

X-GOLD

Space combo pack

DETAILS

GENRE

Space Sim

MULTIPLAYER

No

DEVELOPER

Egosoft

PUBLISHER

THQ

DISTRIBUTOR

THQ

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

G

NEED

P-200, 32Mb RAM, 330Mb HDD, 3D Videocard

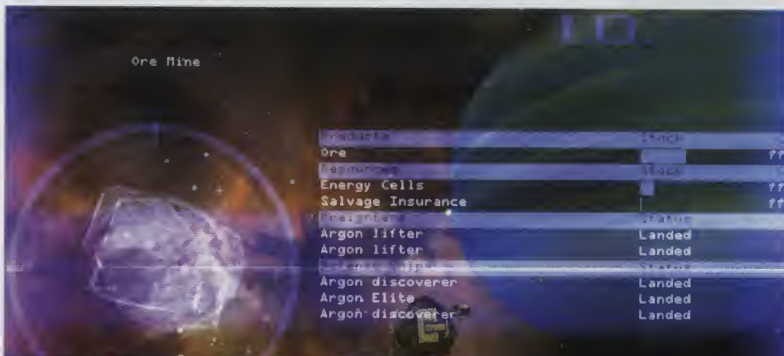
WANT

P11, 64Mb RAM, 385Mb HDD, 8xCD, 32Mb 3D Videocard, joystick

There are some people who would love to live and breathe space-sim/trading games like *Privateer*. For them, the age-old *Elite* can be considered the brightest star in their gaming universe. Approximately one year ago, Egosoft developed *X - Beyond the Frontier*, which took the basic principles of the aforementioned games and combined them with modern graphics rivalling *Homeworld*. THQ has recently re-released *X* with its expansion *X-Tension* in a new *X-Gold* pack.

X-BTF is set in a period when human beings have finally developed a prototype ship with the ability to warp space on its own - without using special warp gates. You, as Captain Brennon, have been chosen to pilot the vehicle on its first test-run. As expected, things go horribly wrong and you end up lost in a galaxy far, far away with a severely crippled ship.

To get repaired, however, you need money. Thankfully, the local inhabitants explain how profit can be achieved through clever trading and, eventually,



A resource screen: ore-some!



Ooh, blue swirly thing in space!

establishing an empire of factories. To do so, you must travel between factories and trading ports ferrying over 60 types of products to get your money. The expansion, *X-tension*, allows you to capture and pilot alien ships as well!

X-Gold is for a select audience who enjoy the intricacies of trading and politics. There is very little action. When things

speed up, through ship upgrades, the game progresses much more smoothly and the graphics are certainly something to behold. Docking with the various space stations is certainly one of *X*'s highlights for sheer visual splendour.

Ryan Hovingh

PCPP

OVERALL

Only for fans of the genre. Little action, lots of trade. Great graphics too!

65%

SHEEP

Hope you've got plenty of RAM! Ha! Geddit?



DETAILS

GENRE

Lemmings Clone

MULTIPLAYER

No

DEVELOPER

Minds Eye Productions

PUBLISHER

Empire Interactive

DISTRIBUTOR

Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE

Now

RATING

G

NEED

P-200, 32MB RAM

WANT

PIII-400, 128Mb RAM, 1.4Gb HDD, 3D Videocard

ONLINE

www.empireinteractive.com

Not the official Sheep site

empire



Seals with their noses glued to the wall

Okay, let's get it out into the open straight away. Sheep? It's a Lemmings clone. Yet it isn't just Lemmings but with sheep in it. There's sheep herding and the play mechanics have been tweaked the a bit. But really it's still Lemmings. As such, it's also a handy step-by-step guide on how to swear loudly at your monitor...

But screaming profanity at sprites can be fun. Notice I said "can". Sheep, like Lemmings, can be fun but - and here's the rub - it essentially isn't. Oh, it's enjoyable to play and it kills time and all that, but it isn't exactly a game that one would want to play of one's own volition. No one would want to play Sheep, it's more kind of there to play around with if you've just completed Deus Ex and have nothing else worthwhile on your hard drive. It's just that kind of game. I'm not saying this a flaw, as some games are meant to be little more than coffee-break time-wasters and often casual gamers simply won't have the time to invest long hours into gaming. Hence, we have Sheep. Cute sheep.

Woolly thinking

Cute or otherwise, the question is: is Sheep for a sometimes gamer who already owns or could easily obtain Lemmings? It depends.



Pastoral? Neo Genetic? Nah, these just look like dumb green sheep to us

MAWY HAD A WITTLE

Sheep allows the player to choose which breed of sheep they'd prefer to herd from a selection of four suitably 'wacky' choices. It doesn't make much of a difference to how you complete a level and is for purely aesthetic reasons alone but for your edification, they are:

- PASTORAL** Standard sheep. Nothing really that spectacular.
- FACTORAL** Like, you know, totally fashionable sheep and stuff.
- LONG WOOL** Dude, these guys are total rocker sheep man.
- NEO GENETICS** Techno-sheep with a modern edge.

See, while Sheep borrows from Lemmings in the gameplay department (herd the stupids through the traps to the exit), it differs sharply in its actual execution and interface. Whilst Lemmings made the player utilise the skills of the individual rodents themselves, Sheep simply puts you in the shoes of a herder of your choice and lets you direct the completely unskilled fuzzballs from a top down, freeform perspective. What this essentially amounts to is a more action oriented experience and a less hair-tearing puzzley type thing.

Oh, but don't think you'll be getting away from this with your quiff completely intact. Because you won't. Thoughtfully stroking your goateed chin isn't enough. Instead, great clumps of hair must be ripped furiously by the fistful in order to fully appreciate the Sheep experience. Sheep is just as aggravating as Lemmings for reasons which

can basically be summarised into one word: control. Controlling sheep and making them do what you want is most annoying as they become more seditious and obstinate as the game progresses and. This is partly due to uber-touchy controls and partly due to the developer's obvious desire to hurt people. It is amazingly, utterly frustrating. It will make you swear. It will make you swear things you've never sworn before. So be warned: don't play this game while the kids are listening.

Sheep is a good game as long as you are not expecting too much from it. Go to work, install it on your computer and give it a whirl at lunch to kill some time. It'll be a welcome change from Lemmings or Solitaire, it will give you a break from work and it will give you a whole new opportunity to slang random swear words together. Enjoy.

Daniel Staines

PCPP

OVERALL

A cute 'n' cuddly 'n' slightly annoying puzzle game

70%

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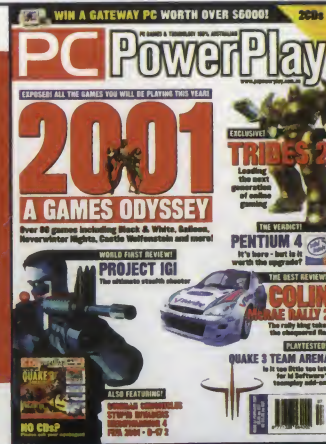
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PC058

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TECH

The silicon state of the art

INDEX



Once again, the Tech section has gone under the knife, courtesy of Dr Bairle and the ever helpful Nurse Wildgoose. Not only have we increased the overall size, but we've added the much-requested PowerTest section, revamped the design and integrated Tech News into the Spotlight pages. The Beast has also gone through an overhaul, expanding to a Beastly two pages.

The rise and fall of 3dfx is something I'm sure is on everyone's mind. Last month, 3dfx finally went 'belly-up' and was swallowed by nVidia. If you recall the heady days of the Voodoo 2, 3dfx was the undisputed king of 3D acceleration. It was one of the original Silicon Valley success stories. Now it begs the question: how could a company with such market domination have such a huge and humbling fall from grace? Anyway, it's all very weepy and sad for those of us who started their sojourn into the 3D graphics world with the awesome Monster 3D...

I made a heinous, punishable error last week, particularly for a PC nutter as myself - I snapped up a Sony PlayStation 2. Despite the hype, I was really underwhelmed by the PS2. The graphics are mediocre, load times horrible and the game library sorely lacking in quality. Also, the absence of an integrated online adapter seems bizarre; online play is definitely the way forward, particularly considering SegaNet's success in the US. Suffice to say, PC stalwarts can rest assured that the PC remains *the* only option for serious gamers. At least until the XBOX...

Summer is ending, so stop playing Team Arena, and get some quality beach-time while you're able. Byron Bay, anyone?

hughns@next.com.au



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THE PCPP POWERTEST SYSTEM



The Power Award is given to the highest performing product each month. We don't take into account the cost of the component, or what extra functionality it might have. We just look for raw power.



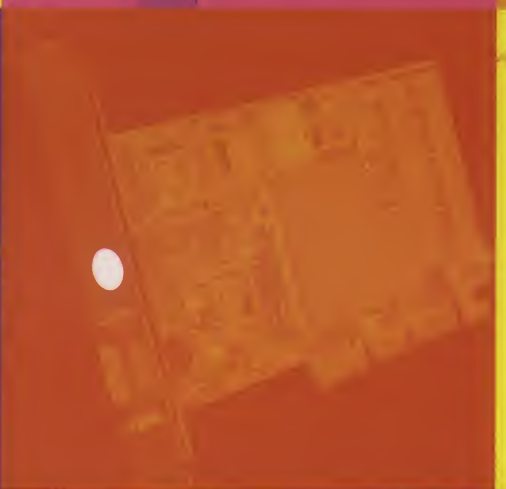
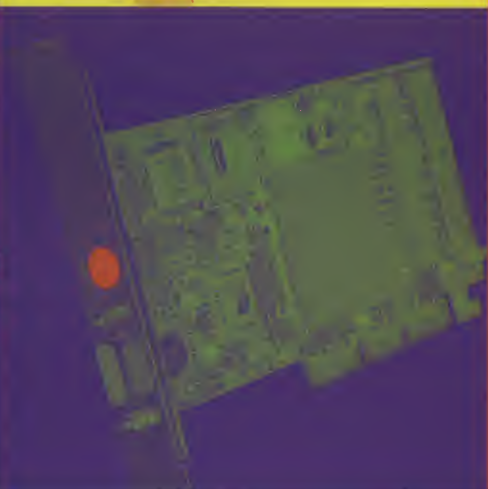
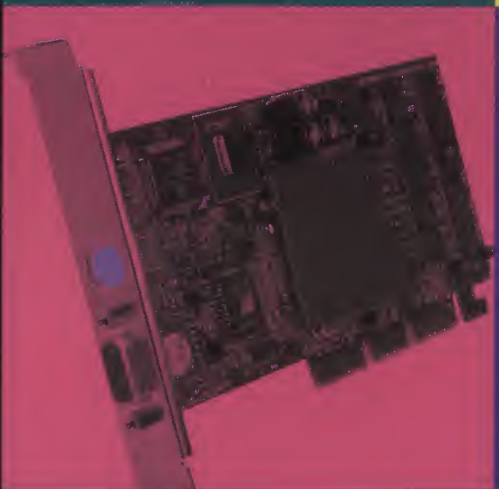
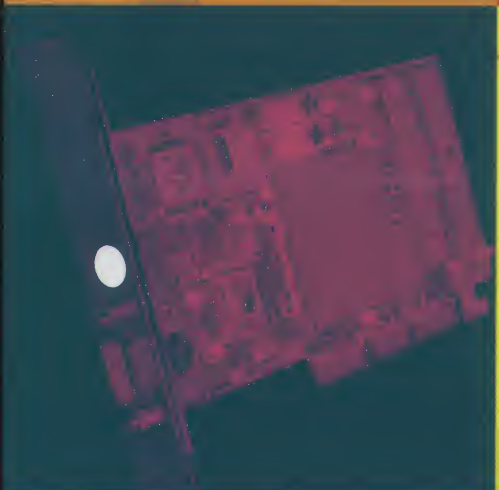
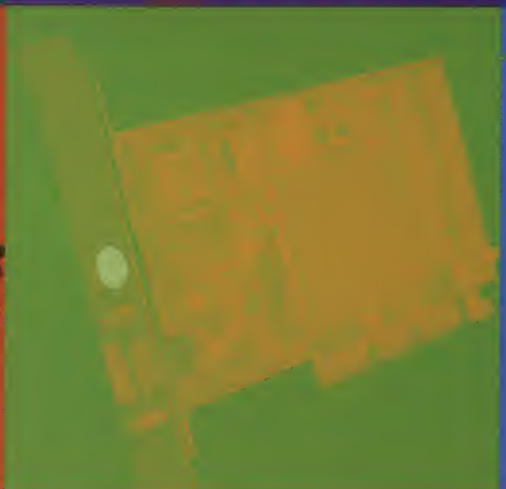
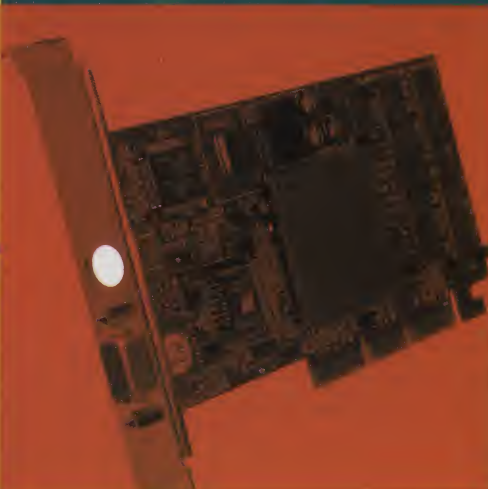
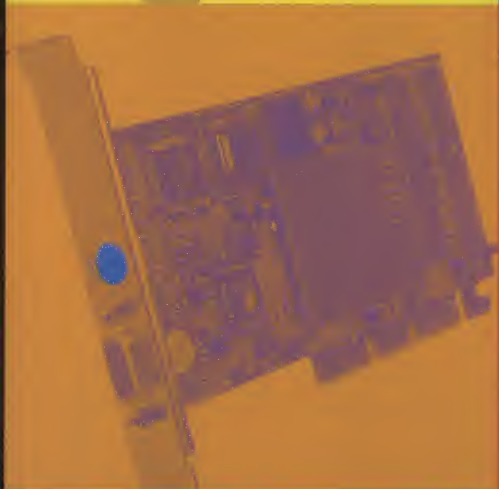
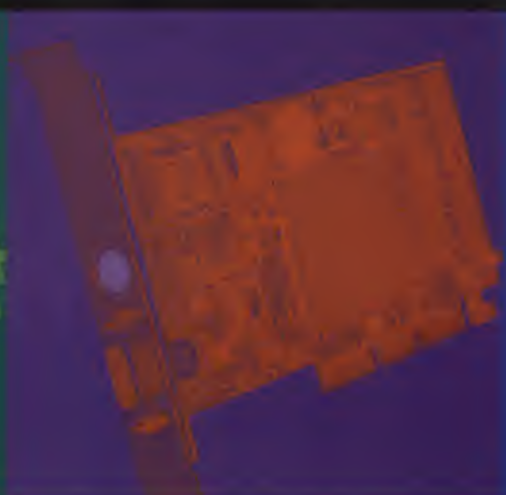
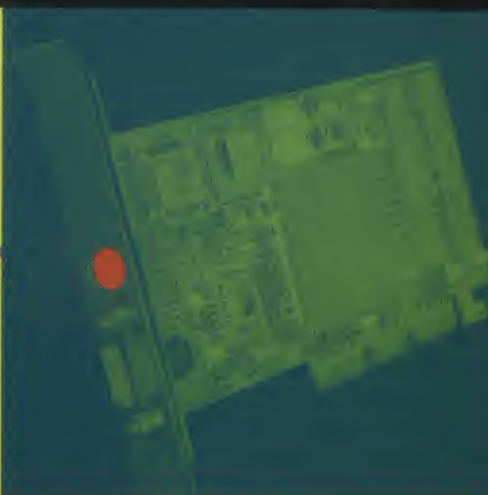
The Value Award is given each month to the product that offers the best balance between performance and cost. It also takes into account any extras that come with the product, such as added connectivity or software bundle.



For some PowerTests, power will be more important than value. For others, value will be paramount. That's why at the end of each PowerTest we give a PCPP Gold Award to the product that, all things considered, is the best buy.

THE PCPP HOTWARE RATINGS SYSTEM

90+	Excellent. A must buy.
80-89	Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance.
60-79	Competent product, significantly behind the State of the Art.
40-59	Mediocre with little to recommend it.
0-39	A dog. Avoid.
Distributor	The local point of contact for the product.
Price	The RRP at the time of going to print.
URL	Where to find further relevant information.





Framerate

VIDEOCARD POWERTEST BY ANTHONY FORDHAM AND HUGH NORTON-SMITH

■ A 3D accelerator is top of the wish-list for most gamers. Later this year, games such as Halo, Return to Castle Wolfenstein and Unreal 2 are going to place increasing demands on hardware. If you're keen to stay ahead of the technology curve, the current generation of supercharged 3D accelerators will propel you through the next year. Over the page, the PC PowerPlay labs have put 15 new cards through the ring for this comprehensive roundup. The standout will earn the prestigious PCPP Gold Award.

We've checked out all of the latest cards, ranging from low-cost to super expensive. Serious gamers won't blink at spending big bucks on the latest fire-breathing equipment. So it's unsurprising that the market is flooded with products in this high-revenue area. For the first time ever, consumer-level videocards are now shooting past the \$1000 mark.

But not every gamer can afford these gaming Goliaths, and not every gamer can justify the high cost when the technology is so quickly superceded. The budget gamers amongst you can breathe a sigh of relief with the arrival of the GeForce 2 MX and the PowerVR Kryo cards, priced in the attractive sub-\$350 arena. The MX boards fared impressively well in our tests and represent compelling value for those who don't mind exchanging a modicum of performance for a much more reasonable cost.

In contrast, the hardcore users want the real speed demons, regardless of the cost. And that's what the new range of GeForce 2 GTS Ultra cards deliver.

Buying Today for Tomorrow

First, the bad news: 3D acceleration technology is in a constant state of flux, and advances are coming fast and furious. Like the leapfrog game in the AMD/Intel CPU race, every six months sees a doubling of performance. The next-generation products nearing release far exceed the capabilities of the brand-new boards in this review. However, if you're hanging out for an upgrade, all of these boards will perform more than adequately for the next year.

If you need to commit today, there are several factors to consider in addition to raw 3D performance. Most important is making sure the board can deliver acceptable image quality in both 3D games and Windows applications. Features like anti-aliasing and a high speed RAMDAC are all-important for visual quality. Early accelerators (Voodoo Graphics, for instance), traded visual quality for 3D grunt. Nowadays, of course, we demand both. DVD acceleration, a TV-Out option, stability and dual monitor support are other areas that should be taken into consideration before making a purchase.

Although the manufacturers and buying public place a large emphasis on hardware, one aspect of performance is often easily neglected and ignored. Video drivers, which allow the operating system to interact with hardware, are essential in performance and stability. The recently leaked 3dfx drivers, for instance, reward users with a large performance improvement as well as support for Hidden Surface Removal. Similarly, the nVidia Detonator3 drivers vastly improve FSAA speed when using GeForce cards.

HOW WE TESTED...

We've tested each of the videocards using Quake 3 and MadOnion's 3D Mark 2000, which are widely regarded as THE definitive benchmarks for 3D performance. Quake 3 tests OpenGL rendering speed, while 3D Mark2000 measures Direct3D game performance using the MaxPayne engine. Both benchmarks should give you an accurate idea of real world game performance. Both tests were looped continuously for several hours, in order to get a good gauge of system stability and the most accurate benchmark results.

Rather than using a ninja 1.2Ghz machine with DDR DRAM, the test system was based around an AMD Athlon 800, Asus A7V with 128Mb of RAM, Windows Me and DirectX 8.0. All tests were run with no background applications running, a refresh rate of 85 Hz and VSYNC enabled. An 800Mhz CPU, we felt, was representative of a more realistic gamers machine.



CREATIVE

3D BLASTER GF2 ULTRA

DISTRIBUTOR Creative Labs 02 9666 6100

PRICE \$999

URL www.australia.creative.com

Since the invention of the graphics accelerator back in the last millennium, there have always been 3D Blasters. Ubiquitous, omnipresent, they provided a constant against which all comers could be measured. And the 3D Blaster GeForce 2 is no exception.

After a shaky couple of years, Creative Labs is back in Australia with a wide range of products. While concentrating on the emergent MP3 market, Creative has still managed to provide a very quick, stable card for our PowerTest.

Like the ASUS Ultra, the 3D Blaster is a bare-bones card built close to the nVidia reference, with only a VGA output. But with Creative's long history in the videocard market, the drivers and bundled utilities allow you to alter just about anything you could think of, from core-speed to gamma in the red channel, although nowadays most manufacturers provide this level of control.

The 3D Blaster is very much a retail, Harvey-Norman style card, and to this end doesn't lend itself to overclocking all that well. The cooler on the main chip is not quite an active heatsink and not quite a fan... perhaps with some extra specialised cooling you will be able to push this card harder. Since we don't actually OWN any of these cards (as much as we would like to) we drew the line at prising off Creative's cooler and adding something of our own.

Nevertheless, the performance of the 3D Blaster Ultra was still good, although we did find it to be the slowest of the four Ultras tested. Fortunately then, the card is also one of the cheaper Ultras, but still the same price as the superior Hercules 3D Prophet II.

All the Ultras tested are good cards, but it takes something extra to make a card stand out from the pack, and unfortunately while the 3D Blaster Ultra shines, it doesn't blaze, and the Hercules remains a better choice.



ASUS

ASUS V7700 ULTRA

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva 02 9742 3288

PRICE \$1099

URL www.achieva.com.au

We had high hopes for this GeForce2 card, and Asus' offering in the Ultra field did not disappoint. In keeping with what seems to be its general design philosophy, Asus has provided a bare-bones card built very closely to the nVidia reference design. This has created a very stable card, even if we do miss out on some of the extras like TV-out.

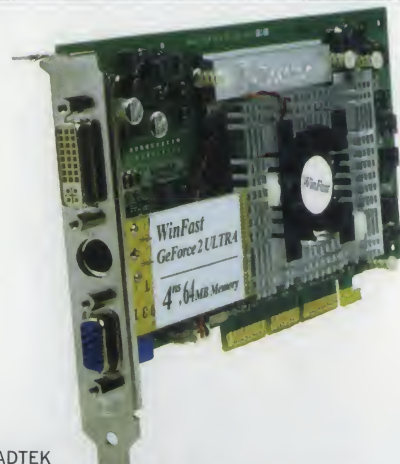
Performance cannot be faulted, with the V7700 Ultra scoring very well in the 3DMark test and coming so close to the Leadtek Ultra in Q3A that we have officially called it a draw.

Where Asus edges out some of the competition is in build quality. This is a very solid card, with a heavy-duty fan, although it does lack the active heat-sink found in the 3D Prophet II. Close examination of the card reveals all other heatsinks to be securely glued in place with no excess adhesive or rough edges.

The supplied utilities offer good overclocking ability. One of the endearing things about Asus is that they actively promote the overclocking potential of their products. While other manufacturers make all kinds of void-of-warranty threats, Asus gives instructions for successful tweaking. It made us more confident to attempt overclocking the card, and our confidence was well founded. However, we found we couldn't push the V7700 quite as hard as the 3D Prophet II before experiencing lock-up and system instability.

Unfortunately though, the V7700 Ultra is a very expensive card, even for an Ultra. An asking price of \$1100 puts it firmly in the 'I wish' category, and hopefully we will see a price drop before this excellent card is squeezed out by cheaper alternatives.

Asus has done the hard yards to build brand loyalty, and like its predecessors, this card will not let you down. After the inevitable price drops in the coming months, the V7700 Ultra will be well worth a second look.



LEADTEK

WINFAST GF2 ULTRA

DISTRIBUTOR Beyond Computers 1300 1300 29

PRICE \$1099

URL www.leadtek.com.tw

A relatively unknown company, Leadtek has recently exploded into the videocard market with a number of very impressive products that really take it to the big boys at Creative and Guillemot. The continuing success of the Winfast range of cards is upheld reasonably well by the Winfast GeForce2 Ultra.

In order to justify the higher price, Leadtek has packed more features onto their card. A digital out for your flat-panel display and a TV-out for... well, for your TV give the card extra functionality over the Asus and Creative offerings. Unfortunately for Leadtek, the Hercules card also has this level of functionality, but remains \$100 cheaper.

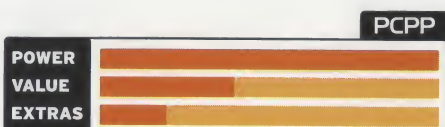
Also this feature set seems to have come at a cost to quality. The card looks cruder than the rest of the field, with a giant metal heatsink and fan combination stuck roughly onto the PCB. The card is large and heavy and just doesn't look the business. And when you're paying more than \$1000 for a card, you want it to look the business.

The poor first impression is a shame, because the card performs very well, placing a solid second in the 3DMark tests. Q3A performance was great too, in a dead heat with the Asus card.

Those who want to get more from their card than what comes out of the box, however, may find themselves frustrated by the clunky and anti-intuitive tweaking utilities that Leadtek have provided. WinFox has a garish, terrible interface, and clumsy translation to English makes it difficult to know what each utility does.

That said, after we spent some time picking through the menus, we found the card quite amenable to overclocking, although without specialised cooling, lockups were very frequent.

All said and done, a competent card from a company still making a name for itself, the Winfast GeForce2 Ultra is ultimately let down by suspect build quality and a higher price.





HERCULES

3D PROPHET II ULTRA

DISTRIBUTOR Guillemot 02 9362 1414**PRICE** \$999**URL** www.hercules.com.au

Before we began the PowerTest, we thought selecting a winning GeForce2 Ultra card would be difficult. We expected the cards to all perform at a very similar level, and the winner would come down to who had the best software bundle. But after a day with the Hercules 3D Prophet II Ultra, we've come to know otherwise. It doesn't have GeForce2 in the title, but it's pure nVidia power all the way.

Hercules - through parent company Guillemot - has long had a reputation for producing tough cards with excellent overclocking ability, and the Prophet II Ultra is no exception. Out of the box, the card is already slightly more powerful than the other Ultras tested here. A 250MHz core and 460MHz RAM can be further thrashed by 5Mhz increments using Hercules' bundled tweaking utility. An electric-blue active heatsink and fan and heatsinks on the memory keep this ferocious card cool and stable. What's more it looks great, on a blue PCB the card is like an elegant European roadster in a carpark full of battered Ford Meteors.

Performance in all bench-tests was without fault, maintaining the highest score no matter what we threw at it. Giants fans will be pleased to know this card laughs at Kabuto and his ninety thousand polygons, and Q3A at 1600 x 1200 must be the reason 19" monitors were invented.

And what's more, the Prophet II has digital flat-panel out and TV out alongside the traditional VGA port. Hercules provide all this extra functionality and somehow keep the price at the lower end of what we expect to pay for an Ultra.

Guillemot has plans to begin distributing the Hercules cards to OEMs, but at this stage only the retail version of this card is available, so even though it's cheap for an Ultra, there is no change from \$1000. But if performance is paramount, you simply cannot go past the 3D Prophet II Ultra. Start saving now, cash in your life-insurance, or spend some quality time with those elderly and infirm relatives.

PCPP

POWER
VALUE
EXTRAS



CREATIVE

3D BLASTER GF2 GTS

DISTRIBUTOR Creative Labs 02 9666 6100**PRICE** \$565**URL** www.australia.creative.com

As the largest manufacturer of GeForce-based cards, Creative has an intimate and symbiotic relationship with nVidia. Both companies worked together to design the reference boards for the GeForce 256, the GeForce 2 GTS and now the GeForce 2 Ultra.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the Creative 3D Blaster GeForce 2 GTS card is a verbatim copy of the reference card. The card is equipped with 32Mb of DDR SDRAM and a comparatively small heatsink/fan combo. Otherwise, it is a barebones product, without TV-Out or a DVI connector. Although these options were included in the original reference design, Creative has opted to strip its videocard down to the bare minimum. Besides, most users who spend over \$500 on a graphics cards for playing games at super-high resolutions won't want to play games at 800x600 on a TV.

Realistically, the only people who should pay for TV-Out are those with outrageously large televisions, or conversely, 14" fishbowl monitors. A decent 19" or 21" monitor will provide you with a much better gaming experience. Most TVs have a maximum resolution of 640x480 resolution at interlaced 60hz, hardly the most impressive specifications. In addition, taking such a minimalist approach with this card also allows Creative to keep production costs considerably lower than the competitors. At the time of writing, the 3D Blaster GeForce 2 GTS was considerably cheaper than other GTS cards, always a crucial factor.

Using a second-generation T&L GPU, the 3D Blaster is no slouch. Sold at the same speed as other GeForce 2 GTS cards, it offers performance virtually identical to the rest of the pack. This is a solid (albeit rather unexciting) card, backed up by Creative's legendary worldwide tech assistance, a three-year warranty and the knowledge that it has been thoroughly tested in the Creative labs.

PCPP

POWER
VALUE
EXTRAS



ASUS

ASUS V7700 GTS

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva 02 9742 3288**PRICE** \$749**URL** www.achieva.com.au

At the core of the V7700 is the formidable GeForce 2 GTS GPU from nVidia, which is able to pump out a sustained rate of more than 25 million texture-mapped polygons per second. The GeForce 2 GTS is much more than a higher-clocked GeForce 256 GPU - besides being over twice as fast as its predecessor, the new core includes a raft of major architectural improvements. The new GigaTexel Shader system (hence the GTS part of the name) and an overhauled T&L engine are key changes, which allow for stunning graphical detail. A capacious 32Mb of DDR DRAM is more than enough for even the most texture-intensive games.

Although in appearance the V7700 is very close to nVidia's reference design, it does include several notable differences. Most substantial of these changes is Asus's SmartDoctor technology. This proprietary technology allows for dynamic overclocking, fan RPM monitoring, AGP power level monitor and protection from overheating. For overclockers and hardware tweekers, this is an important bonus. Also, the inclusion of the Winbond hardware-monitoring chip is another plus. This is a feature exclusive to Asus cards. You may notice that there is no TV-out on the V7700. That feature will be available, along with video-in, on the high-end V7700 Deluxe model. A circular heatsink and fan are mounted above the GPU - the heatsink is a polished chrome affair, although the cooling benefits of this remain questionable. Included with the card is the AsusDVD 2000 software player, as well as a copy of Drakan, Rollcage and a Game Demo disc.

This was the first GeForce 2 GTS card we reviewed, back in PCPP#51. Despite its age, the V7700 still manages to impress. In the Asus tradition, the V7700 flaunts a solid feature-set, excellent performance and superior build quality.

PCPP

POWER
VALUE
EXTRAS





LEADTEK

WINFAST GF2 GTS

DISTRIBUTOR Beyond Computers 1300 1300 29

PRICE \$779

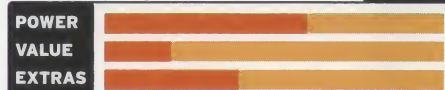
URL www.leadtek.com

The WinFast is clearly a reference board. Save for the addition of a TV-Out jack, the Winfast follows nVidia's original design exactly. Whilst the Winfast isn't at all innovative, it's a robust and stable design. The sand-yellow PCB has a neat layout, with a formidable heatsink mounted above the GPU. Overclockers will appreciate this large cooling solution. Since it's based on the reference design, performance is virtually identical to that of other reference boards. The powerful GeForce 2 GTS GPU provides, as expected, impressive frame rates right across the board. 32Mb of DDR DRAM and AGP 4x rounds out the package.

Drivers are essential in determining a card's performance. They can hamper or push a card to its limits. Issues with the bundled Leadtek drivers need to be addressed. They were outdated and underperforming, so testing was carried out using the nVidia Detonator 3 reference drivers. Sadly, this rendered the TV-Out option defunct. Besides the driver CD, the card comes trussed up with a copy of Winfast DVD and some other forgettable applications. WinFast DVD (a skinned version of WinDVD?) is an adequate DVD software decoder that offers performance close to a fully-fledged hardware-decoding card. The enhanced motion compensation included in the GeForce 2 GTS core provides for full speed DVD playback.

The Winfast is definitely an unexceptional card, lacking that certain *'je ne sais quoi'* to distinguish itself from the competition. At the time of writing, the Leadtek was at least \$50 more than the competition, although it offers absolutely no discernible advantages. In contrast, companies like Hercules and Asus have always strived to develop products that are radically different. Because of this the WinFast GeForce2 GTS remains the John Smith of the PowerTest.

PCPP



HERCULES

3D PROPHET II GTS

DISTRIBUTOR Guillemot 02 9362 1414

PRICE \$649

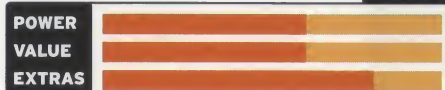
URL www.hercules.com

Hercules has continued its tradition of quality graphics cards with the 3D Prophet II GTS. It's a handsome looking beast, differing markedly from the nVidia reference design. The PCB has a sharp blue finish, which left us yearning for a transparent PC case. In addition, the anodised memory heatsinks look impressive and are surprisingly functional.

With these specially designed RAM heatsinks, the 3D Prophet II GTS has higher stability when overclocking. At stock speed the performance of the Prophet II GTS was only differentiated from most of the other cards by mere fractions. Statistically, a dead heat with just about everything else. Like all GeForce 2 GTS powered graphic cards, the 3D Prophet II ships with a core speed of 200 MHz and a memory speed of 333 MHz. However, by using the included quick-tweak overclocking option, we were able to push the 3D Prophet II to a core speed of 250 MHz and a memory speed of 400 MHz! At this speed, the Prophet II provided near-Ultra levels of performance, whilst maintaining rock solid stability and impeccable image quality.

The 3D Prophet II GTS comes bundled with the obligatory copy of PowerDVD for software DVD decoding. PowerDVD is, without doubt, the best software decoding solution, known for its clean interface and great performance. The software bundle also includes a number of game demos, although this should remain irrelevant when making a purchasing decision. Unfortunately, Hercules didn't include any full games to show off the new board. Really, the fact of the matter is that almost all GeForce 2 GTSs are identical, with the only differences being overclocking potential, drivers, support, software bundle, a TV-out option and looks. With this in mind, the Hercules 3D Prophet II comes up trumps. And, for all the features, you can't beat the price.

PCPP



3DFX

VOODOO 5 5500

DISTRIBUTOR Chips n Bits 03 9696 1911

PRICE \$799

URL www.3dfx.com

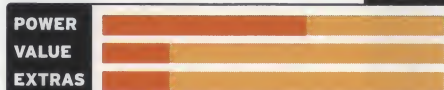
After the disastrous Voodoo3, the expectations placed on the Voodoo5 5500 were huge. With two VSA-100 processors, the much vaunted T-Buffer, and the promise of Full Screen Anti Aliasing, everything looked peachy. Sadly, chip shortages delayed the next-generation Voodoo by almost a year. Released June 2000, the V5 5000 never really made much of an impact. The delay forced the V5 to compete against the GeForce 2 GTS and MX, rather than the less-competitive GeForce 256 SDR.

The most notable feature of the V5 5500 is the stylish FSAA implementation, right out of the box. FSAA really helps in reducing jagged edges in games. Coupled with 32-bit colouring and large texture support, games look best on a Voodoo 5. Sadly, despite two processors, the Voodoo 5 offers rather lacklustre performance. It still rocks in Glide games (such as Deus Ex), but slips behind badly in 32-bit OpenGL and Direct3D applications.

The new leaked 1.04.01 drivers help performance, albeit slightly. These new beta drivers increase FSAA game performance, but they also contain a very exciting 'hidden' feature - Hidden Surface Removal (HSR), courtesy of the acquired Gigapixel-Mosaic technology. HSR reduces bandwidth constraints in complex 3D scenes, and translates into faster frame rates. Effectively, HSR is comparable to the PowerVR tile-based rendering system, although technically more similar to ATI's HyperZ technology.

Without T&L or a huge fill rate, performance doesn't keep up with the pack. At over \$700, the V5 5500 offers benchmark results comparable to the GeForce 2 MX. Because of this, we find it hard to recommend. Also, the dissolution of 3dfx makes this an unsupported product. However, new driver revisions may be released at www.x-3dfx.com, a page run by former 3dfx employees.

PCPP





HERCULES

3D PROPHET II MX

DISTRIBUTOR Guillemot 02 9362 1414

PRICE \$349

URL www.hercules.com

Like other Hercules boards, the Prophet II MX has a chic blue finish. The PCB is especially small, and should fit in even the most cramped cases. With MX boards using only 1/4 the power of GTS boards, the MX runs very cool. As with other cards in this class, Hercules relies only on passive cooling, courtesy of a large blue heatsink. It would have been nice to see the board equipped with a small fan, especially considering Hercules's efforts to seduce the 133t hardcore-hardware-hacker market...

MX cards generally operate with a core at 175Mhz and SDRAM at 166Mhz. Defying conformity, Hercules sells the 3D Prophet II MX with a memory speed of 183Mhz. Hercules have opted for 5.5ns Hyundai RAM, which is significantly faster than the 6ns RAM found on most other boards. Taking into consideration that the memory speed is the chief performance bottleneck in videocard design, and the extra 17Mhz memory bandwidth results in a marginal performance boost. We were able to overclock our board way beyond the stock speed - a 230Mhz core speed and a 220Mhz memory clock was attainable, although any speeds above this resulted in visual artefacting and instability. At this speed, the 3D Prophet II MX gave results similar to the GeForce 256 DDR, which currently retails for around \$100 more.

The 3D Prophet II MX comes with Dual-Display Video. This allows you to hook up a monitor and a TV simultaneously, taking advantage of the TwinView capabilities of the GeForce 2 MX chipset. A standard composite cable is included for connecting to the TV. The software bundle is non-existent.

We wholeheartedly recommend the Hercules 3D Prophet II MX - it is faster than the reference boards, features higher-clocked memory, superior overclockability and TV-Out. And it's blue. Say no more!

PCPP



ASUS

ASUS V7100 MX

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva 02 9742 3288

PRICE \$389

URL www.achieva.com.au

Although largely ignored by manufacturers, TwinView is one of the more intriguing features of the MX chipset. Pioneered at a consumer level by Matrox with the G400 Max Dual Head, TwinHead technology allows a single video card to power two separate monitors, and display either synchronous or independent images on both. For instance, users could surf the web, while watching a DivX movie on the other monitor.

Alternatively, one could have two Windows Desktops open simultaneously for applications where screen real-estate is critical. nVidia's TwinView implementation requires a secondary RAMDAC converter chip to power the two monitors simultaneously, unlike Matrox's G400, which has the secondary RAMDAC actually embedded into the core. This does mean MX cards will cost marginally more for this feature.

The Asus V7100 is the only MX card in the PowerTest with full TwinView functionality. There are two outputs on the back of the card - one 15-pin VGA connector and a DVI plug for attaching a Digital Flat Panel monitor. An included DAC adaptor can transform the DVI signal to a VGA output, allowing one to connect two analogue VGA monitors simultaneously. TwinView features are managed through the Asus driver control panel, and supported in Windows 2000, Me and 98.

In the middle of the orange PCB is the MX chip, with a large black heatsink. The heatsink (without fan) provides satisfactory cooling for the MX chip, especially considering that some manufacturers sell MX boards au naturel, without even a heatsink. The core is clocked at 175Mhz, which is standard for retail MX boards. The 32Mb of SDRAM is rated at 166Mhz. The memory is actually clocked at this speed, rather than the higher 175Mhz or 183Mhz found on some MX cards. Using Powerstrip, this was quickly rectified. In our experience, MX boards overclock like demons. Our test board operated perfectly at a 215Mhz core and 210Mhz memory speed, yielding a hefty performance increase.

PCPP



LEADTEK

WINFAST GF2 MX

DISTRIBUTOR Beyond Computers 1300 1300 29

PRICE \$429

URL www.leadtek.com

There seems to be an implication on the Leadtek website that these cards are By Appointment to Her Majesty the Queen, but that might just be a national accreditation certificate. In any case, Leadtek's MX offering fared poorly in both 3DMark and Q3A tests, barely scraping home in the latter with less than 20 frames per second at 1280x1024x32.

Like the other Leadtek Cards, the WinFast MX looks terrible, with a sickly yellow PCB and cheap heatsink glued in crooked fashion to the chip. While the colour of the board and the exact alignment of the cooling system don't affect a card's performance, a dodgy-looking card undermines owner confidence and highlights any other shortcomings.

Overclockers beware: the Winfast GeForce 2 MX is not your lost-cost solution to a high-performance card. Of the twelve GeForce 2 cards in the PowerTest, this was the only one that refused to do anything at all, locking up if we so much as looked at it sideways. Which, given its poor performance in the benchtests, was quite often.

Once again we are subjected to the cringingly bad WinFox utility and a software DVD decoder that uses just way too many pastels and big faux-3D blobs for our liking. With no other software included, you really feel like the card is all you get.

And the price! The WinFast MX is significantly more expensive than the other cards, and the higher price is not reflected in higher performance. It is a TwinView card, but then so is the Asus, at \$60 cheaper.

Because of the rather high price and the average performance in Quake 3 Arena, the Leadtek WinFast GeForce2 MX TwinView cannot be recommended as a leading choice. Indeed, the absence of any overclocking potential firmly cements this card's position as the runt of the litter.

PCPP





VIDEOLOGIC VIVID!

DISTRIBUTOR	Videologic 1800 067 722
PRICE	\$345
URL	www.videologic.com

With the dominance of GeForce2 cards in the market and in this Powertest, it's good to see a worthy alternative come from Videologic and PowerVR, two of the pioneers of 3D acceleration. The Vivid! dives squarely into the MX niche, with a low price complementing its modest performance.

The Vivid! runs PowerVR's Kyro graphics chip, using the highly efficient Tile Based Rendering system. In any given 3D scene, a large number of surfaces will be invisible, because of the player's position. nVidia cards render the whole scene, then discard those parts that aren't visible. This takes a lot of processing bandwidth, and creates a large amount of redundant rendered material. The Kyro on the other hand, determines which surfaces are visible and then renders only those surfaces. This dramatically improves the efficiency of the card's rendering engine.

Also, like the Voodoo5, the Kyro chip features Full Screen Anti-Aliasing (FSAA). This function removes 'stepped' edges and pixilation by generating intermediary colour to 'smooth' the image. While software FSAA heavily affects frame rate, kicking the most powerful cards squarely in the teeth, hardware FSAA dramatically improves frame rate while providing all the visual benefits of a smoother image.

For this first Kyro card, Videologic has chosen to use a chip running at a much lower clock speed than the GeForce2. But because of Tile Based Rendering performance is impressive, and the card runs cool and remains inexpensive.

With performance equalling MX cards, especially in the 32-bit tests, the Vivid! is a sensible choice, especially if you have no interest in overclocking and want to run a PC without any specialised cooling. Extra features, such as Environment Mapped Bump Mapping make the card very attractive, although the absence of hardware T&L means the Vivid! will always lose to the higher-spec nVidia cards.

PCPP

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	



ATI RADEON ALL-IN-WONDER

DISTRIBUTOR	Servex 02 8762 3500
PRICE	\$569
URL	www.ati.com

In 1996, ATI released the first All-in-Wonder card, a single-slot product which featured 2D and 3D acceleration, TV-output, a TV tuner and video-capture capabilities. The niche market for exotic cards has become very competitive. So, in a bid to remain competitive with the Matrox G400-TV and the Asus Deluxe range, ATI has upgraded its product. The latest AiW card merges the advanced Radeon core with the powerful functionality we expect from ATI.

TV-On-Demand is the most interesting new feature of the AiW Radeon. Like the Vivo system, TV-On-Demand lets users take control of TV viewing. By buffering the TV stream on the hard disk, users can pause or rewind, then scroll forward, or record live TV broadcasts for later viewing. The external Audio/Video breakout box makes it easy to connect input devices to the AiW Radeon. Included are all the cables needed to connect to a recording device. There is also an SPDIF output for hooking the Radeon to an AC-3 receiver, as well as an RF antenna port. When it comes to video compression, the AiW can capture DVD quality with the MPEG-2 codec. Over \$500 in video editing software is included. Ulead's Video Editor 4.0, Digital Immersion's MerlinVR and MicroBasic's Mediator 5.0 are bundled. Video Editor is an enormously popular program, designed specifically for beginners. The program uses a timeline interface to get you creating effective video projects quickly. Transition effects, voiceovers, subtitling and sound effects can be simply added.

The Charisma chip on the All-In-Wonder operates at 166Mhz, slightly slower than the no-frills Radeon. Benchmarks reflect this minimal drop. The AiW is also equipped with only 32Mb of DDR DRAM, although this has a minimal impact upon game performance. The 3D performance is good enough for most, and the ability to watch TV and DVDs, makes this card perfect for those interested getting a start in the world of video manipulation.

PCPP

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	



ATI RADEON 64MB DDR

DISTRIBUTOR	Servex 02 8762 3500
PRICE	\$779
URL	www.ati.com

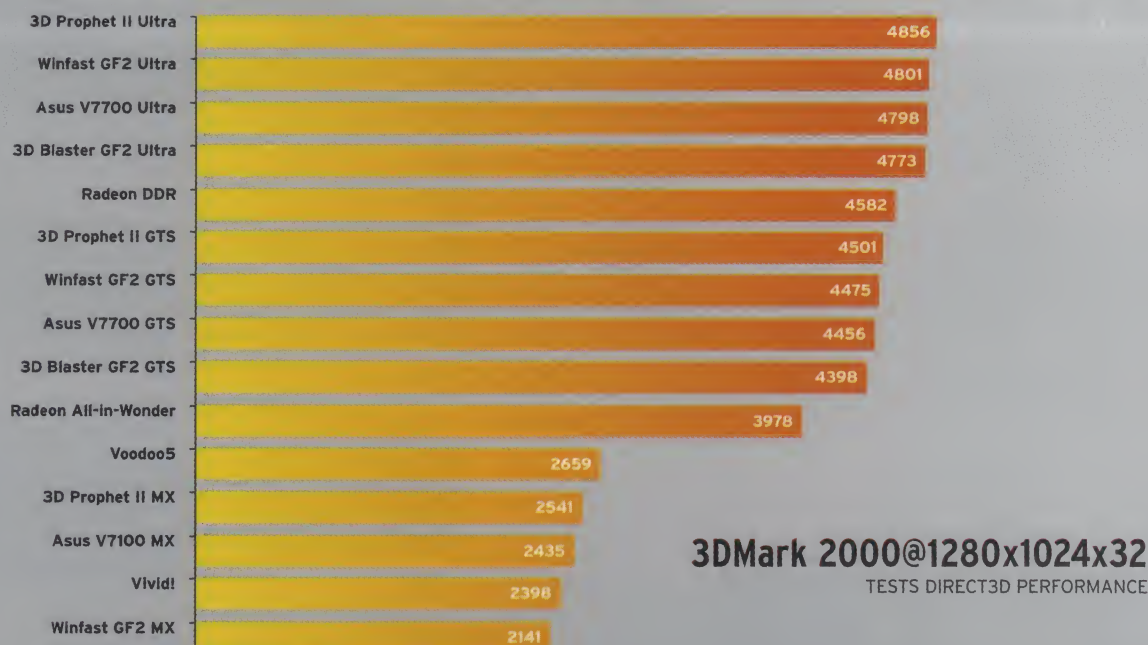
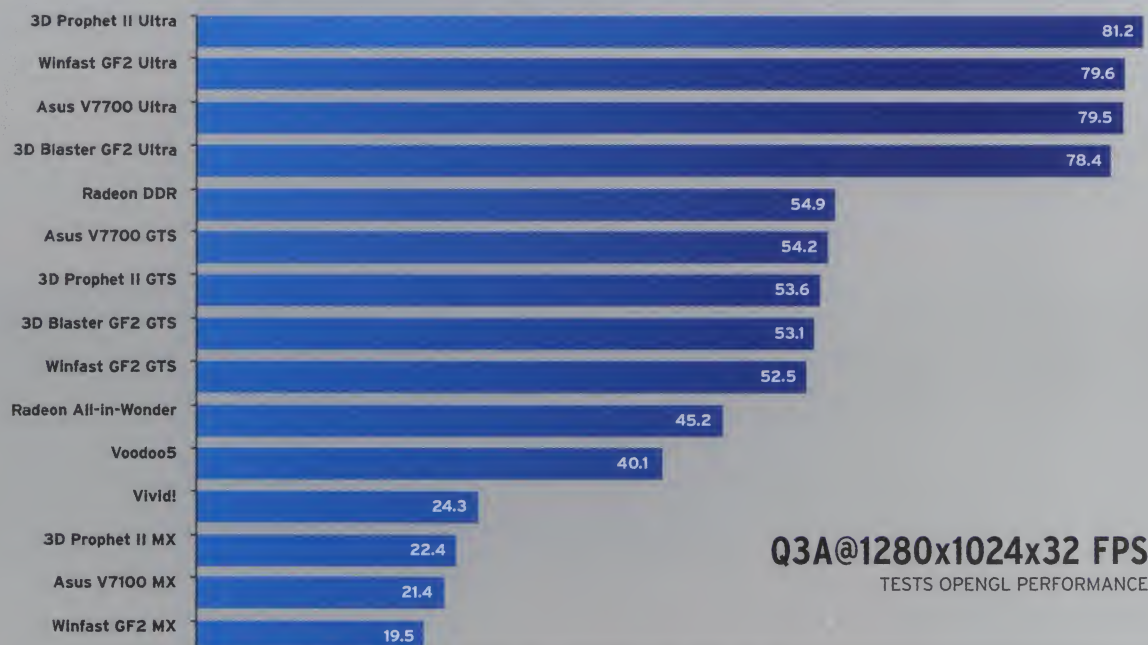
Well known for their low-level OEM products, ATI has made increasingly bold attempts to capture the lucrative high-end 3D card market. Boasting a radically new design and a huge array of features, the Radeon has catapulted ATI to the forefront. It's one hell of a card.

At the core is the most capable GPU on the market, the Charisma Engine, running at a lusty 183Mhz. It's an enormously complex design: The Charisma Engine's constructed from over 30 million individual transistors, 5 million more than the GeForce 2 Ultra. The Charisma Engine is paired with 64Mb of DDR memory, which also operates at 183Mhz, offering an effective 366Mhz bandwidth. Sadly, this is slightly short of the 400Mhz memory claimed by ATI when the Radeon was initially announced. On paper, at least, the Radeon design is more impressive than the GeForce 2 GTS, except that it is limited to a maximum of two pixels per clock, while the GeForce 2 GTS can do four. Not only does the Radeon have a more advanced T&L engine, but it also features Environmental Bump Mapping, some advanced texture-skinning techniques, a third texture unit per pixel and HyperZ technology. ATI has even added hardware-assisted iDCT (inverse discrete cosine transform) capability to aid the MPEG-2 decoding process. If you're into DVD, and hesitant about buying a dedicated DVD decoding card, this is a huge plus. TV-input and output is included, offering basic video editing functions.

Rounding out this tasty package is software-based FSAA, which performs on a level similar to GeForce 2 cards - ie. respectable, but not as good as the Voodoo implementation. At high resolutions, and particularly in 32-bit colour, the Radeon thrives. In raw performance, the Radeon still can't match the brute fill rate of the GeForce 2 Ultra, offering performance closer to standard GeForce 2 GTS cards. The Radeon is a slick implementation of cutting-edge technology, marred by poor drivers and a rather unreasonable price.

PCPP

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	



HERCULES 3D PROPHET II MX

A clean sweep this month from Hercules, with all three awards going to the superior 3D Prophet II cards. The Hercules 3D Prophet II MX has won both our Value and the overall Gold award for this PowerTest, and for good reason. The card is cheap, at only \$349, and boasts TwinView-TV for added value. This MX also outperforms the competition, because the memory is clocked higher than other MX cards. It's overclocking ability is also top notch.



3D PROPHET II ULTRA

The 3D Prophet II Ultra consistently caned the opposition in all tests, finishing in front in both 3Dmark and Q3A. In fact, we're using this card at the PCPP labs. What's more, you get TV and digital out with this excellent card, and it costs \$100 less than the other Ultras.



3D PROPHET II MX

For us, GeForce 2 MX boards offer the best balance of price and performance. The Hercules 3D Prophet II MX is the best implementation of the MX technology - it is low in cost, big in performance, and most importantly, comes in a snazzy blue.

Hotware Reviews

HERCULES

GAMETHEATER XP

DISTRIBUTOR Guillemot 02 9362 1414 PRICE \$299 URL www.hercules.com

Soundblaster Live! is in trouble. It's not necessarily beaten yet, but it's in trouble. With a long-overdue assault on the Creative monopoly, Guillemot have brought a new, fully-featured sound solution to your PC, and it stands up very well against the ubiquitous Live!

While Creative were among the first to provide a primitive, 8-bit bingle-box to sweating 386 workhorses, Guillemot is no stranger to PC sound. Previously though, the French company has concentrated on the high-end professional and semi-professional market, with products such as the Maxisound Home Studio 64 (a personal favourite) and the still cutting-edge Isis.

And it's Isis technology that has created the new card. The Gametheater is an aggressive, no-punches-pulled response to the Soundblaster Live! It has so many inputs, outputs and throughputs it resembles a block of Swiss Cheese. But that's no criticism of build quality; the Gametheater is an all-metal monster, sheathed in black steel. The blue fascia is also metal, as are the volume dials. The unit is built exceptionally tough; despite my best efforts I was unable to dismantle it or even force it apart (don't worry Jean Francois - I didn't break nuthin').

The Gametheater comes in two parts. There's a PCI card and the afore-mentioned Rack that sits atop your system and impresses your friends. It's larger than the SB Live's LiveDrive, and it doesn't fit inside your PC. Those of you with minitowers or slimline cases may also find

the rack too wide to even sit on top of your computer. But it shouldn't go on top of your computer, it should go on your desk, in pride of place, because it really looks like a professional piece of sound gear.

The card and the rack are connected by the biggest, fattest PCI cable you have ever seen. With one of these snaking out of the back of your computer, your machine has just entered serious town. The cable also has a USB connector lashed tight to the side to enable the four USB ports on the rack.

A word on connectivity. The rack has headphone-, mic- and RCA-in on the front panel, along with two USB ports and a game port. On the back though, it has analog out - both RCA and 1/8th inch - supporting Dolby Digital surround with up to five speakers plus subwoofer. There are also coax and optical digital-in ports, and direct MIDI in/out for those of you who like to play along. Finally, there are another two USB ports. When you make the most of this connectivity, the Gametheater rack looks like a fat and self-satisfied spider in the middle of a great web of PC sound goodness.

But how good is the sound? Given the SB Live's domination of the sound market, Guillemot has understood all too well that if it releases a product with even a smidgin less functionality than their Creative rival, no amount of black steel and blue metal will keep their card alive. To this end, the Gametheater supports Dolby Digital, EAX 2, A3D, and Dolby 5.1 Surround Sound for DVD playback.

MIDI is handled by a DSP accelerated synthesis engine which allows for a theoretically limitless number of voices.

The rack also contains a hardware MP3 decoder, and a Digital Signal Processor, which means the

Gametheater goes very easy on your CPU.

What's more, it doesn't chew system resources.

My previous card was a Diamond Monster MX300, and the damn thing used to take up three IRQs, so I couldn't install a network card.

RACK VS LIVEDRIVE...

So we've established that when it comes to pumping out the tunes the two cards are neck-and-neck. But what else gives one the edge over the other? Well, the Gametheater is all metal, it's very hardy. But the SB LiveDrive fits into a 5.25" bay. But the Gametheater has four USB ports in addition to all the optical, MIDI and analog connectors. But the LiveDrive has an IR port with a remote control, so you can sit back and chill. But the Gametheater looks like a professional sound module, while the LiveDrive is a plastic beige horror. In the end, it comes down to IR versus USB and plastic subtlety versus metal ostentation.



Well now I have IRQs out the whatever, and I'm the deadliest guy on the LAN because the Gametheater rack also works as an excellent blunt object to bludgeon skating campers.

An interesting design element of the Gametheater is that there are no audio out ports on the card itself. Everything has to plug into the rack. There is a 1/8th inch auxiliary in on the card, but that's it. Those of you who have a



complicated PC cabinet with little drilled holes, or simply like everything neat and tidy, may find plugging everything into the back of the rack mucks up the Feng-Shui of your gaming den. Also, the lovely golden volume knobs on the front of the rack only control the headphone and microphone volume, so if you've got a Sony speaker system like me, you'll still have to dive under the desk to turn up the beats. But the final killer feature of the Gametheater XP is the price. It's only \$299. The Soundblaster Live! Platinum - the version of the Creative card that has the LiveDrive - retails at \$499. And it doesn't look as cool.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

Serious competition for the SB Live! in an all-metal case with tons of connectivity and a tasty price

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SAMSUNG

170MP MULTI-FUNCTION MONITOR

DISTRIBUTOR Samsung 02 9763 9700 PRICE \$4400 URL www.samsungmonitors.com

Samsung is attacking the PC display market with another Dick Tracey-inspired device. The 170Mp screen is a Monitor/TV hybrid, aimed directly at the gizmo-obsessed and wealthy corporate types.

The Samsung 170Mp looks gorgeous, with an industrial gun-metal finish and silver bezel - It complements the Lian-Li aluminium case perfectly. The tiny chrome buttons and sheer lines are an adventure in stylish minimalism. A remote control is also included, with the same handsome metallic colour scheme. The on-screen display (OSD) is good looking, straightforward and intuitive.



The Samsung display is based around a 17" Active Matrix flat-panel, which offers more viewable area than most 19" CRTs. LCD screens offer a number of advantages over CRT displays. Importantly, the footprint is much smaller, using far less desk real estate. You can even mount the screen on the wall. LCDs are also completely flat, offering a geometrically perfect image. They also use only a fraction of the power of conventional CRTs, and have reduced radiation emission. Even at 1240 x 1024 (75Hz) maximum resolution, the monitor is functionally flicker-less, making it perfect for professionals. Picture in Picture is one of the more exotic features. Not only does it let you show two TV channels simultaneously, but it also allows you to watch TV while playing a game, or visa versa. The window size and position are completely user configurable through the OSD. Inexplicably, the monitor doesn't use a DVI (Digital Input) interface. DVI is slated as the

replacement for the obsolescent 15-pin analogue interface, although only a handful of videocards feature the requisite output. It is supported by most TFT screens, and provides optimal image quality and lower interference. For TV-Mode, there are two composite inputs, and S-Video input and an RF antenna connector. These allow one to connect two external devices, such as a VCR player or a PlayStation 2. Internal speakers are great for watching TV, but unconvincing when deep bass or 3D sound are required.

It's a cool product, but still unsuited to gamers. TFT panels are getting better, but still don't offer the requisite specifications and an acceptable price point. In fast-moving games, the picture has a propensity to blur. So, if you're into spreadsheet sessions, rather than Quake, this is the perfect monitor. Otherwise, get a 21" CRT, and spend the surplus on a GeForce 2 Ultra.

Hugh Norton-Smith

PCPP

An objet d'art for Bang and Olufsen fans, young urban professionals and art school dropouts

85

LIAN LI

PC-60 MIDITOWER CASE

DISTRIBUTOR Australian PC Accessories 03 9763 8200 PRICE \$400 URL www.apca.net.au

The case is the oft-forgotten crucial element in any PC purchase. Remember, this component defines what your PC actually looks like. It is your PC. And for too long we've been expected to tolerate some really amazingly ugly designs. We've had these things in our homes, people. It's been horrible.

But now Lian Li has come through with a case for the gamer who is not only hardcore, but also fashion-conscious. Accessorising beautifully with your Gaggia cappuccino-maker and your Bose Lifestyle system, the PC-60 is perfect for yuppies.

The case is a midtower, so it doesn't take up too much workroom real-estate - leaving precious space for your 80cm Sony FD Trinitron television. Ten bays cradle your particulars: four 5.25 inch, and six 3.5 inch, three of them internal. Two front-mounted fans connect to any standard power supply, and with the addition of another 80mm rear fan, keep those particulars cool and stable.

But it's the little touches that really make the PC-60 a winner. A detachable motherboard

tray provides ultimate access for system upgrades. And you'll be upgrading more than once with this case; it's built to last. Inside there's lots of room and Lian Li has kindly covered the razor-sharp internal edges with a plastic sleeve,



so you won't cut yourself when trying to force a recalcitrant Hercules GF2 Ultra into a tight AGP slot.

The slick design falls down a little bit on the fascia, with a slightly nasty-looking plastic panel around the power button, and some black plastic on the top which looks like it fell off an eight-track. The bays don't have mounting rails, so installing new drives can be a bit fiddly. Also, the aluminium is quite soft and even though the case didn't fall the whole way down the stairs, we still managed to put a little ding in it.

Stylish, roomy and tough, the PC-60 is an excellent case and we love it so much we use it at home, at work, and as the backbone of the mighty Beast. But it's expensive - \$400 without a power-supply. But considering how good the PC-60 looks, and how practical it is, the big outlay brings plenty of return. It's our favourite. It should be yours too.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

Ten bay, three fan, all-aluminium wondercase makes your PC a fashion statement. But it'll cost you...

92

Hotware Reviews

ASUS
A7M266

DISTRIBUTOR	Achieva 02 9742 3288	PRICE	\$349	URL	www.achieve.com.au
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After many months of using pre-release silicon, Asus finally sent us a production-ready A7M266 with 256Mb of PC2100 DDR DRAM for review. Clearly intended for power-users and the high-end, the A7M266 is a killer board.

Unlike Intel, which uses a unified hub design in its motherboards, AMD still relies on the venerable and time-proven North/South bridge design. With the A7M266, the North bridge (system bus) is controlled by the AMD 761 chipset, and the South Bridge (peripherals, interfaces) is controlled by the VIA 686B chip. The brand-new AMD 761 is clearly the most defining part of this board, as it allows the A7M266 to take advantage of DDR DRAM as system memory. It's worth noting that DDR DRAM has a different pin layout as PC-133 DRAM, making it incompatible with older boards, and visa-versa.

market, it should drop rapidly as memory manufacturers ramp-up production. Due to its open specification, DDR DRAM enjoys wide support amongst the memory manufacturers. Ultimately, it should reach price parity with PC-133 DRAM, as the manufacturing process is functionally identical. In contrast, the high licensing and manufacturing costs of RAMBUS will keep it prohibitively expensive for the foreseeable future.

Burst of speed

With the new AMD 761 chipset comes a revised EV-6 system bus. Since the Athlon's inception, AMD has been using a double-pumped 100MHz system bus (effectively 200MHz). In comparison, the Pentium III has been limited to a standard 133Mhz bus. Intel, however, has made a bold attempt to

to the original 100MHz FSB. This will make for some interesting overclocking options, particularly for those using an AMD Duron.

If sufficiently cooled, a 900MHz Athlon, which is intended for a 200MHz FSB, could conceivably operate at 1.2GHz using the pumped-up 266MHz FSB. Overclocking is easily accomplished on the A7M266, either through DIP switches or via the JumperFree BIOS. Bus speeds up to 360MHz can be obtained (180 x 2) with the current BIOS revision. Multiplier adjustment is available from the BIOS, similar to the A7V Rev 1.04, although this will require an unlocked CPU (mechanical pencil, anyone?). Adjustable CPU and I/O voltages will please dedicated hardware tweekers.

Server features

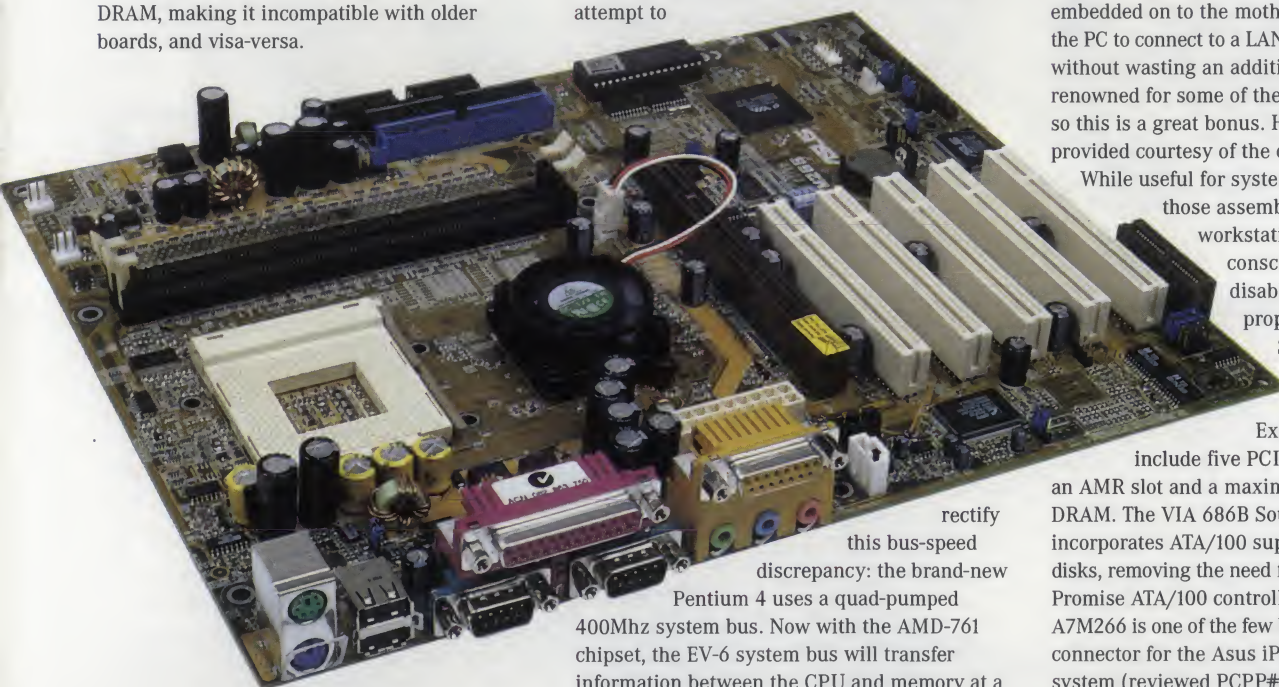
A 3Com 10/100 Mbps Ethernet controller is embedded on to the motherboard PCB, allowing the PC to connect to a LAN or a broadband adapter without wasting an additional PCI slot. 3Com is renowned for some of the best networking gear, so this is a great bonus. Hardware audio is also provided courtesy of the on-board C-Media chip.

While useful for system integrators, and those assembling a no-frills workstation, the multimedia conscious will want to disable this chip and install a proper soundcard, like the SB Live 5.1 or Guillemot Game Theatre (reviewed on p94).

Expandability features include five PCI slots, four USB ports, an AMR slot and a maximum of 2Gb of DDR DRAM. The VIA 686B South Bridge also incorporates ATA/100 support for high-end hard disks, removing the need for the troublesome Promise ATA/100 controller. In addition, the A7M266 is one of the few boards with the requisite connector for the Asus iPanel system monitoring system (reviewed PCPP#57). Like all recent Asus motherboards, the A7M266 includes an AGP Pro slot, which is fully AGP 4x compliant.

The Asus A7M266 is a typical Asus product: impeccably engineered, full featured and bloody fast. It's got the sort of feature set typically found on a server board, at a price marginally more expensive than the competition. As the cornerstone of your AMD system, the A7M266 is well worth the investment.

Hugh Norton-Smith



Traditional DIMM modules, like PC-100 memory, have a maximum throughput speed of around 800 Mb/s. PC133 extends this somewhat with its bandwidth peaking at around 1.05 Gb/s. DDR is an abbreviation of Double Data Rate. As the name suggests, this emerging memory standard promises twice the available bandwidth of conventional PC-133 DRAM. Of course, DDR DRAM is really not that new at all. It's a proven technology: videocards like the nVidia GeForce and the ATI Radeon have been using DDR DRAM for the past year, as it offers considerably higher performance than SDRAM. Although the price of DDR DRAM remains high in the Australian

rectify this bus-speed discrepancy: the brand-new Pentium 4 uses a quad-pumped 400Mhz system bus. Now with the AMD-761 chipset, the EV-6 system bus will transfer information between the CPU and memory at a nippy 133MHz (effectively 266MHz). The increase in speed, from 200 to 266MHz FSB, coupled with the implementation of PC2100 DDR DRAM will theoretically deliver unprecedented burst speeds of 2.1 Gb/s!

In order to use the new 266MHz FSB, AMD has released three new processors running at 1GHz, 1.13GHz, and 1.2GHz. The Athlon design itself has not changed save for a lower clock multiplier to take into account the higher FSB. For example, while the normal Athlon 1200MHz runs at a multiplier of 12x, using a 100MHz FSB, the newer version comes with a multiplier of only 9x. Older Socket-A Athlons will work in AMD-761 boards, although they will be limited

PCPP

The ASUS A7M266 is a rock-solid board, offering every conceivable feature and wicked performance

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SAMSUNG

DIGIMAX 35 MP3

DISTRIBUTOR Samsung 02 9763 9700 PRICE \$499 URL www.samsung.com.au

In an ongoing quest to hybridise, Samsung has released a new 'multimedia device' that attempts to mesh all the functionality of a portable Digital Camera, USB WebCam and Mp3 player into the one package. We had high hopes for this package. Unfortunately, our hopes were dashed on the shores of abject frustration at this awful, awful product. In the bid to cater to all audiences, Samsung has created a chimeric gimmick that will surely fail to satisfy anyone.

The press release accompanying the DigiMax says it all: 'This product is ideal for teenagers wanting it all!' With its 'frrresh' and 'funkeee' design, as well as the zany headphones, this is a product clearly aimed at the clueless youth demograph and other techno-bimbos. Nicking design cues from the iMac, it looks and feels cheap. The included headphones are equally nasty and plastic.

Of the three functions, the DigiMax is principally intended for Digital Photography. In this department, it features a 5.8mm fixed-focus lens and automatic flash. Users can take

photos at either 320x240 mode or in the 'high resolution' 640x480 mode. Both modes produce equally crap images, offering results comparable to those achieved with a pin-hole camera I assembled in high-school science class. These blurry travesties are stored on the removable 16Mb Compact Flash Card. By connecting the camera to a PC with the provided USB cable, pictures can be transferred. Photos taken with the digital camera can be emailed to friends, used as novelty desktop wallpaper or posted onto amateur web sites. David sends his playtime snaps to StileProject.com. Unsurprisingly, the included image manipulation software was bug-ridden and counter-intuitive.

The DigiMax also offers limited MP3 playback functionality. The tiny LCD screen offers a small array of options, allowing you to shift between tracks and delete songs. Samsung have omitted a search function and the ability to display the track title. And with only 16Mb of memory (upgradeable via Compact Flash Card), users could, at most, store three songs. Audio quality was, as expected, sub-standard.



As a webcam, the DigiMax hit a new nadir. After the laborious process of setting the DigiMax up in NetMeeting, users are rewarded by a shabby frame rate, outrageously unrealistic colours and shockingly bad picture quality. I don't think it would be unreasonable to suggest that the Samsung team be whipped naked through the streets of Sydney to atone for their sins. Avoid.

Hugh Norton-Smith

PCPP

A dumb idea that has been badly executed. Avoid at all costs just about says it all

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CREATIVE

BLASTER 121032

DISTRIBUTOR Creative 02 9316 0550 PRICE \$599 URL www.australia.creative.com

As the name 121032 implies, the new Creative driver writes CDs at 12x, re-writes at 10x, and reads at up to 32x. Two important features set the Creative 121032 apart from the competition: CD-Text support and BurnProof technology.

CD-Text is the latest extension to the Red Book CD audio format - The Creative 121032 is one of the first CD-RW drives capable of burning CD-Text information directly to CD. CD-Text allows newer CD players to display additional information like the title of the album, the name of the artist and the song title. It saves a lot of time usually involved in programming your CD player, or resorting to the CDDb Internet CD Database.

Developed by Sanyo, BURN-Proof stands for Buffer Under RuN Proof. It's a new technology implemented in high-end CD-RW drives, which helps eliminate the possibility of Buffer Under Runs. Most people who own CD-RW drives will have witnessed the 'disk creation failed' message more times than they can count. - These buffer under-runs occur when your PC isn't able to deliver data to the CD-RW drive fast enough. Reasons for this include a slow PC, multitasking, network access and interface problems. Because of this, BURN-Proof is the chief selling point of the Creative 121032, and allows users to write CDs at full speed, while simultaneously accessing applications on their PC. Without ever producing coasters. It also increases the drive's

ability to detect and rectify potential data transfer errors, ensuring perfect copies every time. Instead of the usual bundled Adaptec software, the Creative 121032 comes with Nero 5.0. Nero is a professional CD

mastering tool, perfect for backing-up almost any type of CDs, including audio and game CDs. Harry swears by it. In addition, Creative has also added Prassi abCD, a clone of Adaptec's DirectCD. AbCD is a packet writing program designed for archiving purposes, which allows for 'drag-and-drop' access to CD-RW discs. It makes writing data to a CD-RW disc as simple as writing to an internal hard drive. Sadly, abCD supports only CD-RW, so if you want to use a CD-R disc as an ad-hoc hard drive, you're out of luck. Incidentally, the drive is fully supported by CloneCD.

As a replacement for an old CD-R drive or a standard CD-ROM, the Creative CD-RW Blaster 121032 is an excellent purchase. It's well priced (especially compared to the Plextor), and offers a compelling array of features including BurnProof Technology, CD-Text, an internal S/PDIF connector and 12x burning.

Hugh Norton-Smith

PCPP

A fast and reliable drive, BURN-Proof technology really sets the 121032 apart from the competition

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THE BEAST

THE ULTIMATE RIG

Welcome to the Beast. The ultimate gaming PC. The PCPP Tech Team has spent hours trawling the Web, pounding pavement, and talking with hardware experts to construct the phastest, phattest rig available. The Beast is so exclusive, no single Systems Integrator is powerful enough to build it. You'll have to collect each piece and with them, forge the gaming behemoth that is...

Pioneer 16x DVD ROM with Hardware Decoder

Distributor Pioneer

Price \$549

URL www.pioneeraus.com.au

Pioneer's excellent drive will take care of all your DVD movie needs. Whether it's the introspection of Kriztoff Kieslowski's *Three Colours: White* or the non-stop gore-fest of Peter Jackson's *Braindead*, your viewing pleasure will remain uninterrupted by glitch, skip or irritating load-time. You also get a tasty Videologic hardware decoder for the smoothest possible shave... er... movie, and a bunch of Video Ezy vouchers.



Creative Blaster CD-RW 121032

Distributor Creative 02 9316 0550

Price \$599

URL www.australia.creative.com

Writing at 12x, re-writing at 10x and reading at 32x, this Creative CD-RW also features revolutionary burn-proof technology that ensures every copy is a successful copy. Of course we would never endorse copying a whole bunch of Britney Spears albums and then burning them in a public place as some kind of artistico-political statement, but if you want to do such a thing, this drive is the one to do it with.



AMD Athlon 1.2 GHz

Distributor AMD Australia

Price \$649

URL www.amd.com

This blazing processor has the most advanced floating point unit in the world, 256k of integrated full speed L2 cache and a 200Mhz EV6 Front Side Bus. Which equals FAST. Never wait for



Outlook to load again, ever. Do six things at once. Go mad, play *Giants* on the highest detail setting at 1600x1200. This thing is so powerful it's bad for you, guaranteed.

ASUS A7M266

Distributor Achieva 02 9742 3288

Price \$350

URL www.asus.com.tw

The first Athlon motherboard supporting Double Data Rate RAM, the A7M consistently kicked twelve kinds of Bass Avenger out of our KT133 ATV board here in the PCPP Labs. As with all ASUS components, the A7M comes loaded with extras; an AGP Pro slot for all those gamers with professional graphics cards, 4 DDR RAM expansion slots for a ridiculous amount of memory, ATA/100 support and a host of overclocking features.



256Mb DDR DRAM

Distributor Kingmax

Price \$749

URL www.kingmax.com

Once you go to 256Mb you will never look back. You will

wonder how you ever survived with a miserable eighth of a gigabyte. This RAM is phenomenally expensive, but runs at a Double Data Rate, a blistering 266MHz. This really pumps up system performance, especially while you render a level in Q3Radiant and kick Thresh's buttocks in Unreal Tournament at the same time.

Seagate Cheetah X15 18Gb

Distributor Agate Technology 02 9870 3600
Price \$1191

URL www.seagate.com

Sure it's not huge, but it's the fastest hard disk on the block, consistently pulverising the competition into small, vaguely circular lumps. The X15 runs at a stupidly fast 15,000rpm and has 4Mb of cache. It's only 18Gb, but two or even three of these would allow you to save every thirty seconds in Deus Ex. Amazing.

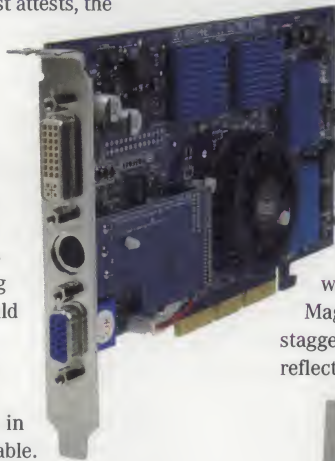


Hercules 3D Prophet II Ultra

Distributor Guillemot 02 9362 1414
Price \$999

URL www.hercules.com

As the PCPP PowerTest attests, the Hercules 3D Prophet II Ultra is the fastest card on the market. Priced very competitively for an Ultra, it comes with digital and TV-out as well as standard VGA. The Prophet Ultra has excellent overclocking ability, exceptional build quality and funkiest, spunkiest electric blue PCB to make this card pick of the bunch. And in the Beast, it's unstoppable.



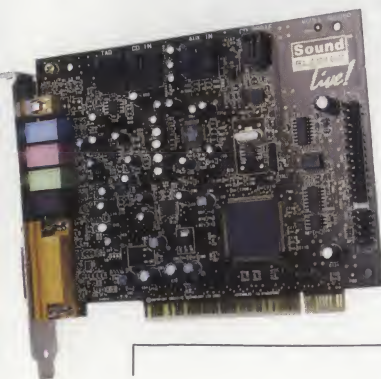
Soundblaster Live! Platinum

Distributor Creative
Price \$499

URL www.australia.creative.com

A contentious issue, this component, with the arrival of Guillemot's Gametheater XP. But when it comes to the crunch, the Live! has the unblemished track record and established market presence to still make it the gamer's

choice. Every possible audio requirement is taken care of, and what's more the LiveDrive has a wicked little remote, so you can really kick back and watch those Jane Austen DVDs.



Videologic Digitheatre LC

Distributor Videologic 03 9722 2089
Price \$695

URL www.videologic.com

The Digitheatre setup has it all: six speaker surround, a hefty bass and music fidelity that makes a Rotel system blush and look the other way. Your Styx compilations and Gary Glitter Best Of's never sounded better. We also like Britney Spears, although that has nothing to do with music.



LianLi PC-60

Distributor Australian PC Accessories 03 9763 8200

Price \$400

URL www.apca.net.au

A stunner. All aluminium and built to withstand a direct nuclear strike in the megaton range. As we have mentioned more than once, we even dropped this case down a flight of concrete steps and it barely flinched. Ten bays keep everything snug, three extra fans keep it cool, and slide-off covers and a motherboard tray mean it's ready for upgrade action any time.



Sony G500 21" FD Trinitron Monitor

Distributor Beyond Computers 1300 1300 29
Price \$2050

URL www.by.com.au

Big is beautiful. Never a truer word was spoke. Sure, you'll have to completely redesign your study or gaming room to fit this monster in, but once it's in, you'll wonder how you ever did without it. Magnificent in every way, capable of a staggering 2048x1536, crystal clear, anti-reflective and thoroughly good for your soul.



Microsoft Intellimouse Optical

Distributor Microsoft

Price \$89

URL www.microsoft.com.au

While the big silver Intellimouse Explorer certainly looks nice, we find the key word here is big. It's too big. But this little fellow is just right. An optical sensor means you will never have to scrape that revolting black gunk off the inside ever again, and a USB connection means your lightning reflexes will now be fairly reflected in your next game of Tribes.



Logitech Cordless Freedom Navigator

Distributor Logitech 02 9972 3711

Price \$219

URL www.logitech.com

Unchain your heart! Or at least unchain your keyboard. With all the kit the Beast includes, you'll end up with a huge ugly snarl of cables behind your desk. The Cordless Freedom Navigator eliminates at least one potential deathtrap (use your imagination) and the soft-as-silk keys make typing a 40,000 word thesis on Post-Structuralist Feminism an absolute breeze. Also good for Quake3, but too good for Team Arena, obviously.



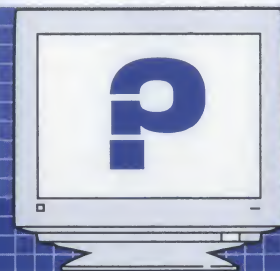
TOTAL BEAST VALUE

\$9040

SETUP

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

DANIEL RUTTER WAXES TECHNICAL



WRITE TO

SETUP

PC PowerPlay
PO Box 634
Strawberry Hills
NSW 2016
setup@pcpower
play.com.au

When you write remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated *.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC.

Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please remember to write clearly or better still print your letters. Please note that due to the volume of messages we receive, we cannot guarantee a response to all of your queries.

NT4'S BAD, MMKAY?

Q I have a PC running Windows NT 4.0 Service Pack 5. Being a gamer, this is very unfortunate as I cannot run any of the latest games requiring DirectX. My PC cannot be connected to the Internet, and changing operating system is not an option. Is there anything I can do? If not, praise the lord for Unreal Tournament.

Toby McFadden

A Indeed, not a day goes by at PCPP when we don't praise the Lord Our Horned God, not only for UT and the handful of other games that can be bludgeoned into working on NT4, but also for the bountiful slaughter he soon will unleash upon the people whose mobile phones play The Yellow Rose Of Texas. He quite likes the Bubble Bobble theme, though.

Wait, did I say that out loud? And I did a Satanism gag last month, too, didn't I? Never mind then.

Anyway, in response to your observation about not being able to run current DirectX games - that's right, you can't! And you'll never be able to! Hurrah!

NT4's highest DirectX version is 3.0a, under Service Pack 6. If you want a higher version than that (and you do, if you want to play games), and you want to stick with an NT-series operating system, you can't do it without upgrading to Windows 2000.

Win2000 is really WinNT 5.0, with Win2000 Professional the equivalent of the Workstation version of WinNT. Its game compatibility is excellent. Old and new games, 133t demos, you name it; it all works, and there are Win2000 drivers for most (but not all) popular hardware, including all that USB stuff that you can't use with NT4.

On a given hardware configuration, Win2000 is likely to give you somewhat lower 3D game frame rates, but much better stability more than makes up for it. Y'know those "precautionary reboots" you have to do all the time on Win98 machines because you know the computer's going to screw up if you, say, run a game and quit it and run it again? Win2000's not like that.

MORE (CHEAP) POWER!

Q Can you please tell me if there is currently, or will soon be, a converter to allow Socket A Durons to be used on Socket 7 motherboards? Currently I have an AMD K6-2 350MHz processor on an Asus P5S-B motherboard, and while the \$180 (fan inclusive) Duron 700 seems like a tasty upgrade for a cash-strapped bugger like myself, the \$300 - \$350 Socket A motherboards make this processor much more expensive than it seems.

Sam Miller

It's not utterly technically unfeasible to put pretty much any processor on pretty much any motherboard, just as it's not absolutely impossible to drop a five litre V8 into practically any car ever made. It's just so impractical to adapt something like a Socket A CPU to something like a Socket 7 motherboard that, like putting a V8 in a VW Beetle, it'd end up costing you more than it would to get something that was designed for the extra power in the first place.

Even if a company could sell a squillion such adapters and thereby dilute their development costs, you'd probably still end up paying more than a proper Socket A upgrade would cost you. And thanks to the inefficiencies of bolting a new fast engine into the old-car frame of a Socket 7 PC, a hypothetical drop-in upgrade gizmo with a Duron 700 on it wouldn't give you as much power as a normal computer with the same processor.

This is not a new phenomenon. Look at major sellers of "overdrive" processors like www.powerleap.com, and you'll find the price to speed ratio is pretty lousy. They're convenient one-step upgrades, so corporates who don't want to rip their computers apart buy them. But few other people should bother.

"Overdrive", by the way, is what Intel called their upgrade CPUs of this type. They looked cool, and they worked as a genuine drop-in replacement. But they were generally REALLY stupidly expensive, for the speed you got.

MINIDISC MP3?

Q This is not really a question but I have come up with a solution to MP3 players' lack of storage space: design a MiniDisc player that is capable of storing and playing MP3 files. Simple.

The MiniDisc medium is perfectly suited for MP3 players. They're small, they hold 140MB of data (which is almost double the largest Memory Stick available) and above all they're cheap, \$6 at the most. Compared to \$200+ for a 64Mb memory stick, the advantages are clear.

Speaking of cost, MD players only cost between \$300 and \$600, which is comparable in price, if not cheaper, than current MP3 Walkmans. Sure the price might be raised slightly for the new design but the savings made on storage media more than make up for it.

Hopefully someone in the industry manifests my idea or at least "coincidentally" releases one in the coming months.

Jeffery Holt

A MiniDisc is Sony's format, licensed to other manufacturers. And Sony utterly detest MP3, possibly because they're also a major record company, with several big labels to their name.



An Intel Pentium II Overdrive CPU for Pentium Pro systems

LETTER OF THE MONTH

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS...

AN INCREDIBLE SIDEWINDER GAMEVOICE ONLINE COMMUNICATION PERIPHERAL, COURTESY OF THE NICE PEOPLE AT MICROSOFT. HURRAH FOR THAT!

YOU! OUTSIDE! NOW!

Q In regards to your answer to "Arkaine" about upgrading options (PCPP#56) it would seem that you are misinforming people on a grand scale. How much do you really follow the hardware scene? AMD systems do support 133MHz SDRAM and have done since the release of the VIA KX133 and VIA KA133 chipsets. The FSB is actually a double pumped 100MHz bus giving an effective throughput of 200MHz. The big advantage being that you can run RAM speeds up to 200MHz, or DDR200 with performance gains all the way. So there's a vast improvement in speed in going to the 133MHz RAM over the 100MHz. For proof go to any old (and I mean OLD) review on www.toms-hardware.com or www.anandtech.com and have a look at the difference.

Again on the hard drive note. With Windows using a swap file for temporary memory and a 7200RPM HDD being a total of 33% faster in transfer rates, and quite often at least 1ms quicker in average access there is a significant increase in speed especially during game play with lower memory. I have a friend with an identical system to me, an AMD Athlon 700 with Thunderbird core. A major difference is that he is using a 5400RPM HDD and I a 7200RPM HDD. We both go into the same software, say Diablo II and mine is up and away long before his. See, the HDD has to perform not just a read operation, but write certain core elements to the swap file, then load as much as it can into memory. Then it has to sort out what it puts into virtual memory and performs another read write there. This all takes a lot of time and obviously a fast HDD will make a lot of difference. Since it only costs another \$25-\$40 for the 7200RPM HDD of the same size then it is definitely worth the extra speed don't you think? And to prove it, yet again, benchmarks at www.tomshardware.com and www.anandtech.com.

Paul Kabzinski

A Guess what, Paul? You're wrong! Older model Athlon systems using Standard Data Rate (SDR) RAM do indeed have a 200MHz CPU bus, but that's the speed

from the CPU to the motherboard north bridge chipset, not from the chipset to the RAM. There are 133MHz bus speed Athlons out now, with a 266MHz doubled CPU-to-chipset bus speed. These systems can take advantage of PC133 RAM, and DDR RAM too if the motherboard supports it.

On many 100MHz RAM bus Slot A and Socket A systems, the motherboard can run the RAM faster than the non-doubled FSB. But this gives practically no measurable benefit, and certainly no perceptible speed increase for any task. The FSB bottlenecks the RAM speed.

Increasing both the FSB AND the RAM speed gives you a genuine RAM bandwidth gain, but few meant-to-be-100MHz SDR boards tolerate FSB settings much above 120MHz, and 115MHz or so is more likely.

A 15 to 20% RAM bandwidth increase, again, generally gives no perceptible system performance increase. Unless you're doing severely RAM-limited tasks, which would be unusual for a desktop computer user. If you don't sacrifice stability by doing it, then go ahead and get what you can for free, but don't expect too much.

PC2100 DDR RAM modules

The new DDR systems, with twice the bandwidth of PC100 and PC133 memory (for PC1600 and PC2100 DDR RAM, respectively), are a different story. The much faster DDR RAM can deliver real world speed increases. But these increases are still well under 50% for every desktop task I have found.

For games, running in high res and at high detail levels, the difference commonly approaches zero. Because even if you've got a GeForce2 Ultra, the graphics card can still very easily be made the limiting factor by cranking up those prettiness-sliders. The RAM speed then fades into the background.

At high enough resolutions, even CPU speed can make little difference,



because everything's waiting for the graphics card to paint the screen.

You cannot "run RAM speeds up to 200MHz" on any SDR Athlon motherboard, old or new. No PC SDR SDRAM supporting speeds much above 150MHz exists. I think the record stock speed at the moment is 170MHz, but "PC150" is still the fastest on sale in Australia, as far as I know, and I think you're stretching even the shiniest SDR-RAM motherboards if you manage even that speed.

PC1600 DDR RAM runs at 200MHz (doubled 100MHz, but a real 200MHz signalling rate); if SDR memory and motherboards could do the same thing, there'd be no reason to use PC1600.

PC2100 runs at 266MHz.

With regard to your hard drive comment, I think you will find I pointed out that a faster hard drive helps if you have not enough physical RAM, but more physical RAM helps a lot more.

Arkaine was asking whether he should get a 15Gb 7200 or a 20Gb 5400, and I just said that pretty much any current drive with enough space for all of your files is good enough for games, provided you have got adequate RAM. Sure, big disk operations are faster with a faster drive. But from the gamer's point of view, it's no big thing.

With regard to the Tom's Hardware and Anandtech references you made, do feel free to tell me what reviews you're talking about. Any time.

TECH TIP

ARE YOU RUNNING WINDOWS 2000?

[Giant chorus of gamers: "NO!"]
Jolly good, then.

The three readers left may be in the habit of getting to the Win2000 Task Manager by hitting Control-Alt-Delete (random note - the Del key on the keypad works as well as the other one for three-finger salute purposes, regardless of your Num Lock status), then clicking the Task Manager button.

You can cut out the middle step by just pressing Control-Shift-Escape; presto, one Task Manager.

This works in Windows NT as well, but I will probably lose even my audience of three if I start on about WinNT tricks.

Sony digital music hardware is all copy-controlled out the wazoo. If anybody with a MiniDisc license made an MP3 player that used MiniDisc tech, I presume Sony's brigade of the C. Montgomery Burns Assault Lawyers Division would shortly be projecting legislative laser-sights through the offenders' bedroom windows.

You'll see Sony making an "MP3 Walkman" shortly after you see Fred and Elaine Nile doing TV endorsements for a sex aid that looks like baby Jesus.

The MD Data format, onto which computer files can be copied, is in any case pretty much dead. Iomega ate Sony's lunch with the Zip drives, which were always considerably faster than MD Data, and now offer a lot more capacity.

And MD Data's incompatible with ordinary audio MiniDisc, anyway - there's no way to use MD Data discs in audio MiniDisc players. And no ordinary MD Data drive can record, or read, audio MiniDiscs, as far as I know, although some are dual-mode - you can plug them into a PC and use them as a data drive, or use them by themselves as an audio recorder/player.

Sony have a special MD Data2 format as well, with 650Mb data capacity versus the 140Mb of the plain MD Data. Like that idea? Tough. Data2's used only by Sony's technically interesting but commercially unsuccessful DCM-M1 MD Discam digital camcorder, which can only store 10 or 20 minutes of video per disc, depending on the quality you pick. It's got a nifty Java user interface and an Ethernet connection, though. But there's another solution.

You can buy a couple of MP3 portables that use Iomega's little Klik disks. Klik never really took off, because they're only 40Mb and priced poorly compared with Zips. Iomega call the Klik the PocketZip now, but it's the same thing, and their own HipZip player uses it.

The HipZip costs more than \$650, as I write this, but the disks are only about \$200 for ten. Since the HipZip understands Windows Media Audio as well as MP3, you can encode files as 96 or 128 kilobit per second WMA and fit a good 45 minutes or more on each disk, while still getting the audio quality of 160 kilobit (or higher) MP3.

FASTER MODEMS, SLOWER SOUND...

Q Just a few quickies.

[1.] Will there, or can there, ever be a modem that will run faster than 56kBs? If no, Why not? [2.] Can a crappy sound card slow down games? I have a fairly cheap 3D sound card, which uses A3D drivers. Could this card affect the game, or is it the drivers that determine how well the sound card works?

BigJohnson

A [1.] Well, LargeTonker, the modem speed question's one that's been answered wrongly by technical types many times over the years. 2400 bits per second was the limit, once upon a time. The wires canna take any more, cap'n. After all, they're only made for voice.

Then the encoding systems used got more complex, and 9600 was possible. And some people said THAT was the practical limit. Then 14400 came along, and no way could it be improved upon, said various people who weren't busy improving upon it.

And hey presto, there was 28800 and 31200, and, in due course, 56000.

"56K", though, really is a pretty hard limit; there really are laws o' physics involved, and there is a limit to the amount of data you can squish through a connection with given physical specifications.

Phone line modems are constrained by the miserable 3.3 kilohertz bandwidth of the voice phone system, which also generally has a pretty poor signal-to-noise ratio. 56K modem standards all match their signal levels to the 256 signal levels of phone company analogue to digital conversion gear, and so pack in more data than could a

system that didn't know about the A-to-D oddities involved. But even with all the stops pulled out and every kink exploited, exactly 64 kilobits per second is the hard limit, because that's all the bandwidth that the telco digital hardware has.

In the real world, with a lot of nasty analogue copper between current "56K" modems and the phone exchange, modems seldom manage better than a 48kBs connection. That's only downstream, too - from the ISP to you. Upstream, you only ever get 31.2kBs.

So it's not impossible for slight improvements to be made in phone line modem performance, but no big leaps are even theoretically possible without an upgrade of the voice phone system.

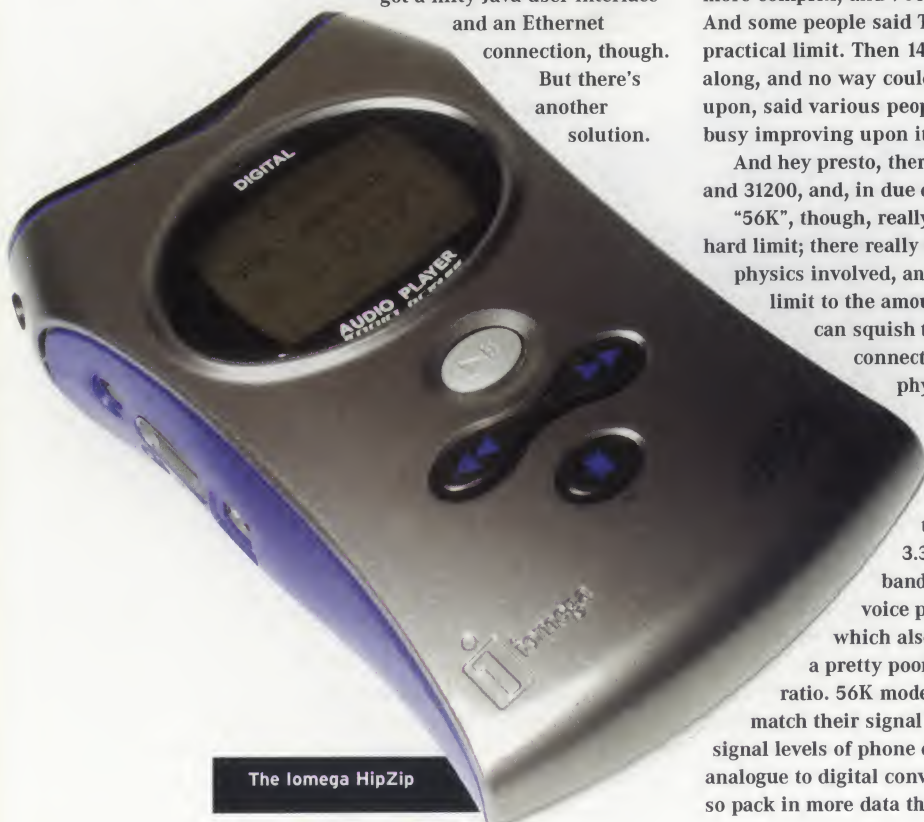
[2.] If you're not doing fancy positional (3D) sound, the type of sound card you have will make very little difference to system speed. PCI cards eat less CPU time than ISA ones, but the difference is trivial. Even if your sound card doesn't have enough channels and the CPU has to do lots of real-time mixing, any somewhat current CPU will be able to take it in its stride. 2D sound is easy.

3D audio is a different kettle of fish. If you do some positional audio work in software - which cheaper 3D sound cards often do - then the very serious phase and equalisation calculations that are necessary to fool your brain into thinking a sound's coming from somewhere other than one of your speakers (or headphone transducers) can cause a BIG performance hit.

You can do positional audio with pretty much any sound card at all, but it's of only academic interest unless your sound card has the ability to take on most of the load. It's the same as 3D video; in theory, you can do software 3D that's every bit as good as hardware, but without an accelerated video card you will find that the beefy CPU in the world has not nearly enough grunt for the job.

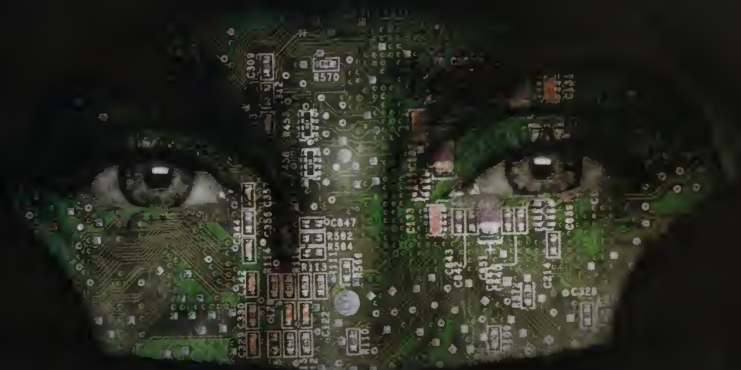
Quality 3D sound cards, like Creative's Sound Blaster Live and the old Aureal Vortex 2 cards, have full hardware 3D sound and will make a real performance difference compared with more software-dependent cards. Only if turning on 3D sound causes a big obvious frame rate drop, though, should you consider a better sound card on performance grounds.

By the way, the Vortex 2-based cards are now unsupported after Aureal got eaten by Creative, but the old Windows 98 drivers are perfectly fine. So if that's the OS you are using, do consider buying a discounted Vortex 2 board if you can find one.



The Iomega HipZip

AOpen



There's nothing like the great outdoors. Especially when it's whipping past your window at 200mph on the autobahn. Introducing the **Geforce MX Deluxe**, one of the fastest **3D graphic rendering engines** on earth. With nearly 350mhz it will catapult you from 0-60 mph in 1.2 seconds. Its massive brakes and beefed graphics engine provides rock-solid handling in the tightest turns. And for an even greater thrill, they don't come any faster than the **Geforce 2 GTS chipset**. Race in to your nearest **Servex** dealer and **feel the need for speed**.

The Geforce MX deluxe works best with the Servex range of cards:

PA256 Deluxe Geforce 2 GTS DDR • PA3000 8MB (Riva TNT2 Vanta chipset) PA3000 16MB (Riva TNT2 Vanta chipset) • PA3020Pro (Riva TNT 2 Pro chipset) • PA3030 (Riva TNT 2 Ultra chipset)

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**Geforce MX
Deluxe**

CD POWERPLAY #58



Starting CD PowerPlay

Welcome to the latest CD PowerPlay. Without a doubt, the biggest thing this month - in fact, the biggest in PCPP's long history - is the full version of Starsiege Tribes gracing the second disc. Hop online and start fragging your fellow PowerPlay readers immediately!

Then take a break and check out the cool demos we've got for you. Whether it's Diablo II, Alice, Fallout Tactics, or Colin McRae Rally 2, there's surely something for everyone...

cdtech@powerplay.next.com.au

Faulty CDs will be replaced free of charge. Send it, together with a description of the error, to:

PC PowerPlay CD Returns

Reply Paid 634

78 Renwick St

Redfern NSW 2016 (No postage required)



DEMOS CD1

AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE

Category Action

Publisher Electronic Arts

Need PII-500, 64Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D Videocard

Taking a liberal license with Alice in Wonderland, Rogue Studios and American McGee (the designer behind Doom, Doom II, and various Quake II mission packs) puts you in the forefront of a dangerous and exotic Wonderland, where everyone has gone mad, an insane Queen of Hearts has taken over, and Alice returns a little older and a lot wiser to restore Wonderland back to the fantasy she knew.



Controls

Primary Attack: Left-click
Alternate Attack: Right-click
Move Forward: [W]
Move Backward: [S]
Strafe Left: [A]
Strafe Right: [D]
Jump/Swim Up: [Spacebar]
Climb/Swim Down: [F]
Use Item: [Enter]

FALLOUT TACTICS BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL

Category Tactical Combat

Publisher Interplay

Need P-200, 32Mb RAM

Join the Brotherhood of Steel, a technological revival group dedicated to restoring the world to its former prosperity through science and whatever means necessary. Take part

in a quest to reawaken long-dormant technology in order to defeat a powerful enemy in the one of a kind Fallout Universe. Each mission involves various hostile obstacles that must be overcome using tactical skirmish warfare.

Controls

MOVEMENT

Left Click on Ground: Move
Ctrl-Left Click: Force Move
Alt-Left Click: Formation Move
Shift-Left Click: Run
Double-Left Click: Run
Backspace: Stop

SPOTLIGHT CD1

DIABLO II

Category Action RPG

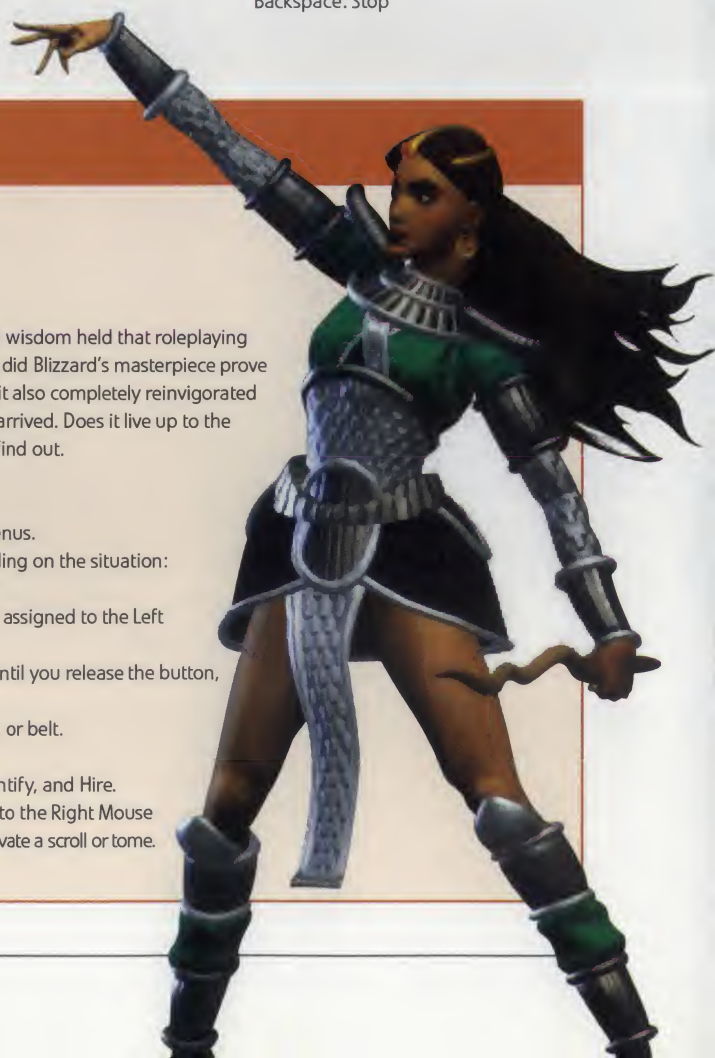
Publisher Havas Interactive

Need P200, 32Mb RAM

When Diablo was released in early 1997, conventional wisdom held that roleplaying games were dead, buried, and all but forgotten. Boy, did Blizzard's masterpiece prove otherwise. Not only did Diablo sell a gazillion copies, it also completely reinvigorated the RPG genre. Now after three years the sequel has arrived. Does it live up to the enormous hype? Check out this exclusive demo and find out.

Controls

Esc - Toggles the Esc menu on/off and exits other menus.
Left Mouse Button - Performs "smart" actions depending on the situation:
Click on a spot on the ground to go to that spot.
Click on a monster to attack it using the skill currently assigned to the Left Mouse Button.
Click and HOLD on a monster to attack it repeatedly until you release the button, or the monster is dead.
Pick up/drop items from/onto the ground, inventory, or belt.
Operate shrines, doors, and chests.
Interact with the NPCs - Talk, Trade, Gamble, Hire, Identify, and Hire.
Right Mouse Button - Use the skill currently assigned to the Right Mouse Button on a selected target, drink selected potion, or activate a scroll or tome.
Arrow Keys - Scrolls the Automap.



DEMOS CONTINUED

ACTIONS

Left Click on Object: Use
(Talk/Open/Get...)

COMBAT

Left Click on Target: Fire Weapon
Right Click: Fire
Ctrl-Right Click: Force Fire
U: Left/Right Hand Toggle
Y: Cycle Weapon Modes
T: Targeted Shot Toggle
R: Reload Weapon



SQUAD CONTROLS

NumPad 1-6: Select Squad Member
NumPad /: Select All Squad Members
NumPad -: Sentry Mode Off
NumPad +: Sentry Mode Aggressive
NumPad *: Sentry Mode Defensive
NumPad Enter: Stand
NumPad . or Del: Crouch
NumPad 0 or Ins: Prone
Ctrl 0-9: Set Group
0-9: Select Group

TURN BASED

Enter: End Combat
Space: End Turn

ONI

Category Action

Publisher Take 2

Need P-200, 32Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D Videocard

Oni is a thirdperson 3D action game that emphasises hand-to-hand combat as well as gunplay. Inspired by anime classics like Ghost in the Shell and action thrillers like La Femme Nikita, you play Konoko, an elite agent on a quest to infiltrate and destroy a ruthless crime syndicate.



Controls

Movement - W, A, S, D
Look - Mouse
Punch - Left Mouse or F
Kick - Right Mouse or C



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0

Category Racing Sim

Publisher Codemasters

Need PII-400, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D Videocard

Colin McRae Rally was last summer's hottest property and now Codemasters is extending the original design of Colin McRae Rally 2.0 to include network and online play for PC gamers. Better buckle up, Colin McRae is back!



Controls

Left - Left
Right - Right
Accelerate - Up
Brake - Down
Handbrake - Space
Gear Up -]
Gear Down - [
Change Camera - C
Rear View - R

MECHWARRIOR VENGEANCE

Category Action

Publisher Eidos Interactive

Need PII-300, 64Mb RAM, 16 Mb 3D Videocard



MechWarrior: Vengeance weaves heart-pounding BattleMech action with the continuing drama and unfolding storyline of the perpetual BattleTech universe, now in its 16th year. Vengeance portrays the players'

TECH CD1

WEBSHOTS DESKTOP

Webshots Desktop includes more than 2,000 full-screen color images in categories such as sports, scenics, wildlife, travel, 3D, and more. These photos are used as your desktop wallpaper and screensaver via the Webshots Desktop software. The software includes an automatic Web connection that downloads new photos each day.

MP3 LIQUID BURN

This CD-burning application designed for its speed and sound quality, features noise reduction and filtering, overscan, and MP3 digital cleaning. Orion Studios also included advanced error protection to eliminate common CD-burning problems. MP3 Liquid Burn is designed to be an intelligent program for your MP3s and CD burner.

DESKTOP DNA

Upgrading to a new PC? Now you can easily migrate your applications, settings and files from one system to another. Desktop DNA enables you to selectively copy applications, Registry settings, important system files, folder contents, and even entire drive contents across a network, or when you're upgrading.

THUMBNAILER 6.5.3

ThumbNailer creates thumbnails from your images. It supports GIF, JPG, PNG, TGA, PCX, EMF, WMF, TIFF and AVI. It will create HTML pages for you. It has plug-in support, extensive HTML customization, input/output filters, image enhancement, resizing, format conversion, and more.

epic struggles to reclaim their birthright as they command an awesomely armed 40-foot tall, 80-ton, 90-mile per hour war machine across the remote battlefields of a hostile world.

Controls

Turn Left - Num 4
Turn Right - Num 6
Pitch Torso Up - Num 2
Pitch Torso Down - Num 8
Torso Twist Left - Num 7



DEMOS CONTINUED

Torso Twist Right - Num 9
Accelerate - =
Decelerate - -
Toggle Forward/ Reverse - Backspace
Fire Jump Jets - J
Set Throttle by 10% - 1 through 0
Center Legs to Torso - Shift Space
Center Torso To Legs - Space

Fire Selected Weapon /
Weapon Group - Enter
Change Firing Mode - \\
Select Next Weapon - P
Select Previous Weapon Group - [
Select Next Weapon Group -]
Fire Group One - Num 0
Fire Group Two - Num 7



GAMEPLAY CD1

DEUS EX MULTIPLAYER PATCH

This is the patch that Deus Ex have been waiting for. Full multiplayer action, fixes for a few bugs (such as the crash when using the Hazmat Suit), updates for new videocards and OpenGL support. What more could you want.

HITMAN CODENAME 47 SP1

This service release patch addresses problems with weapon selection when replaying levels, crashes in the Jungle levels for Voodoo users, the dancer in "Gunrunner's Paradise" lockup and the Scroll Lock now moves game into "slow motion".

Fire Group Three - Num 9
Fire Group Four - Num Del
Fire Group Five - Num 1
Fire Group Six - Num 3
Target Next Enemy - E
Target Nearest Enemy - Shift E
Previous Enemy - Control E
Shutdown / Startup Mech - S
Flush Coolant - F
Show Mission Objectives - O
Select Next Nav Point - N
Select Previous Nav Point - Ctrl N
General Chat - Y
Team Chat - U
Crouch C
Getup - G
Toggle Lights - A
Toggle Searchlights - L
Eject - Ctrl Z
Look Down - M
Toggle Mouse On/Off - Ctrl

evil scientist Dr. Terror. By order of the New U.N., your mission is to recover all stolen technology before Dr. Rampage takes over the world!

TECH CD2

ESSENTIAL VIDEOCARD DRIVERS

To help you achieve the best performance with your current videocard, here's a collection of the latest drivers for an assortment of cards, chipsets and APIs. In addition, there are over 50 utilities to tweak and overclock your videocard.

Voodoo5
Voodoo rush
Voodoo banshee
Voodoo 3
Voodoo 2
Stealth 3
Riva TNT
Open GL
Nvidia
Millennium G
Diamond Viper 2
Plus more!

ZEOS FIGHTERS

Category Action
Publisher TBA
Need P-100, 16Mb RAM
The year is 2040. The U.S. government in alliance with Russia II has developed a Top-secret microchip and jet propulsion combination known as the Zeos engine. During the final testing stages, the engine and all technical plans were stolen with force by the

SERVER CD1

ROGER WILCO

Roger Wilco is like gamer's paradise. You can play in multiplayer mode with verbal interaction and can command your team of Mechs, or taunt your enemies as you hunt them down. Warn other players of potential hazards or trick them into a dragon's lair. It's entirely up to you. It really brings multiplayer gaming to life. Best of all, it's free.

NAPSTER

Napster is a search engine that allows you to find and download MP3 audio files. It eliminates the problems of conventional FTP transfers by using cutting-edge technology to ensure the completion of each MP3 download. This latest version features transfer improvements, a new search feature, and new renaming abilities.

DOWNLOAD ACCELERATOR

Download Accelerator is a file download accelerator/manager that can increase download speeds by up to 300 percent. It features multiserver connections for best performance. Download Accelerator can also recover from lost connections, computer shutdowns, and other errors.

IMESH

iMesh is a search tool that lets you locate and download audio, image, and video files from the Web. The files you search for are located on the computers of other iMesh users. They have agreed to share their files with other people in the iMesh community. Searches can be conducted either from within the iMesh application, or through the iMesh Web site.

FREE GAME CD2

FULL VERSION OF TRIBES FOR FREE!

In-depth reviews, a new tech section with an exhaustive PowerTest, and a free complete game. All part of our mission to make PC Powerplay the best ten bucks you've ever spent.

Tribes is an online classic. Featuring awesome teamplay, character classes, vehicles and wide open spaces to spread mayhem and death, Tribes has carved itself a comfortable position in multiplayer gaming's hall of game.

Played entirely online, with no single-player capability beyond the exhaustive training missions, Tribes pits groups of

players against each other in enormous landscapes filled with bases and turrets to seize and wreak havoc with. There's close-quarters firefighting, and long range sniping, as well as strafing and bombing runs using the troop transporters and jetpacks. It's everything you need for online play.

And it runs on a modest machine; if you can manage a P2-350 and 32Mb RAM you don't even need a 3D videocard. But you will need a 56k connection to the Internet, Tribes is multiplayer only.

Controls

MOVEMENT

Turn Left - Numpad 4
Turn Right - Numpad 6
Forward - W
Backwards - S
Strafe Left - A
Strafe Right - D
Look Up - Numpad 8
Look Center - Numpad 5
Look Down - Numpad 2
Jump - Space
Jet Pack - R.Button
Crouch - X
Free Look - F

WEAPONS

Blaster - 1
Plasma Gun - 2
Chaingun - 3
Disk Launcher - 4
Gren Launcher - 5
Laser Rifle - 6
ELF Gun - 7
Mortar - 8
Target Laser - 9
Fire Weapon - Left Button
Throw Mine - M
Throw Grenade - G

OTHERS

Deploy Beacon - B
Use Pack - P
Use Repair Kit - H
Score List - TAB
Zoom - E
Zoom Range - Z
Commander C
Chat - V



FINDING A TRIBES GAME ONLINE

There is a huge online Tribes community, so finding a game is no problem. Choose Play Game from the main menu, create player and click next. Assuming you've already connected to the Net, the game will then ping the master server and retrieve a list of games for you to join.

You should watch your ping before joining a server, as a high ping will make the game unplayable. You can ask only for servers with low ping by using the Filters function under Options, Join Server, Filters. Set conditions for low ping, and you're away. Happy fragging!

IN HINDSIGHT...

Red Alert 2



NOW THAT THE WAR IS OVER, WESTWOOD'S **MARK SKAGGS**, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ON THE LATEST COMMAND & CONQUER TITLE, TALKS ABOUT HIS TOUR OF DUTY...

When Tiberian Sun was released, it had to contend with the enormous and - to be honest - unrealistic expectations of millions of gamers. As such, anyone anticipating a revolution was bound to be disappointed, especially with the tepid re-run of past glories that was eventually delivered.



What Red Alert does to other RTSs

With Red Alert 2, everyone knew what to expect - not to mention that the extremely short period of time between the game's announcement and release prevented the hype machine from running out of control. As such, no one could be disappointed, especially with the incredibly polished and balanced gameplay that was swiftly delivered. Westwood has every reason to be proud of Red Alert 2. Let's find out if this is true...

PCPP: How do you feel about the final, boxed, retail version of Red Alert 2?

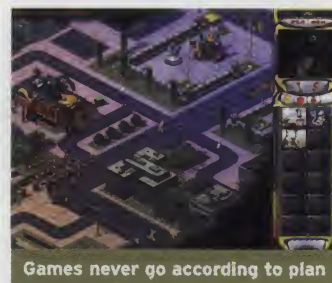
Mark Skaggs: I'm extremely happy with it. The team worked very hard to create this game and their talent, excitement and passion came through in the final product.

PCPP: Did the game's development schedule run more or less smoothly than you had anticipated at the start of the project?

MS: (LOL). Development never goes the way that you plan! Red Alert 2 was no different. I did however have great fun while working on this project and this comes down to the great people I had the opportunity to work with. Of course there were some real tough moments, but overall things went well.

PCPP: What was the greatest challenge the team faced along the way?

MS: The greatest challenge was trying to create a great sequel to the first Red Alert that people would love as much as the original. We all loved



Games never go according to plan

the original and have to live up to our own expectations as well as those of the fans. It was personal pride.

PCPP: How much did Red Alert 2 change during development? Or how close to its original design document did it remain?

MS: The amazing part of this product is that much of the underlying design



Before... For the 'After' pic, turn to p128



Westwood is dropping hints about an expansion pack and Red Alert 3



The S11 protestors get serious

philosophy and goals remained the same all the way through. I think we had the benefit of working hard at the beginning of the product to define what it would be. Up front planning, working with an established franchise and a team that loved the original game helped make sure we stayed true to our vision.

PCPP: What would you have liked to have added but were unable to (for whatever reason)?

MS: I'm very satisfied with the product as we shipped it. There's always more features than time. That's the nature of game development. Given that, we've got some great plans for a mission disk and there's always Red Alert 3.

PCPP: Which one aspect of the game are you most proud of? And which one aspect are you least happy with?

MS: Overall, I'm most happy because the game is really fun and addictive. I've been lucky with Red Alert 2 that I now have a new favourite game of all time and that's not just because I was part of making it. If there is anything

that I'm least happy about, it would be that I don't get enough time to play!

PCPP: What kind of reception has the game met with - critically, commercially? Has the response been expected or unexpected?

MS: The reception has been great and amazing. As more people weigh in with reviews after playing the game, the reception just gets better and better. Commercially the product is doing amazingly well! I wasn't as concerned about the commercial success as much as making sure the game is great and that our fans have fun. I am very pleased with the response from our fans. That matters the most to me.



Now that's a roadblock

PCPP: Do you think you have answered those who criticised Tiberian Sun?

MS: It's easy to stand on the sidelines and critique the efforts of others. The reason Red Alert 2 is so successful is in part the foundation the Tiberian Sun team laid for us. Their hard work on Tiberian Sun and their support and participation in the development of Red Alert 2 has allowed us to do a better product than otherwise possible. All that being said, our critics have spoken for themselves and many consider that Red Alert 2 is Westwood's best game to date. I think they have answered their own issues.

PCPP: What have you learned from Red Alert 2 that you'll be taking into your next project?

MS: Wow. We learn so much from every project. A couple of key things we will be taking into the next project include our learning on how to make sure our game is fun and balanced, as well as how to make sure that we set and hold to the right vision for the game.

PCPP: What can we expect to see down the track in terms of patches, expansions or sequels?

MS: We are still setting up our plans going forward, but I expect there to be some new cool features we release as patches as well as an inspirational expansion pack. As for Red Alert 3... no comment. ;)

PCPP: What's next for Westwood?

MS: It's going to be an amazing 2001 for Westwood. We're going to release our first 3D RTS (Emperor: Battle for Dune), our first 3D action game (Renegade), or first persistent state world (yet to be announced) and our first PS2 game (yet to be announced). It's going to be a historic year for us.



Hammy acting: a C&C trademark

110 PCPP

Sound
BLASTER
Live!

PLATINUM 5.1



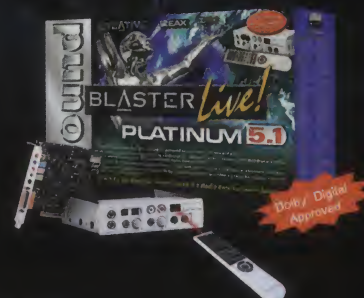
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THEODORE



Giants? You ain't seen nothin' yet...

QUIZ

TRIVIA OBSCURA

Write in with the answers to these and you will WIN NOTHING but fame, notoriety and the grudging respect of the entire PCPP crew (even the monkey).

1. H Norman Schwarzkopf is Hard Kore, but what does the H stand for?
2. From which epic poem did Frank Herbert rip off the name 'Atreides'?
3. Which member of the PCPP team did fast-bowler Nathan Bracken go to school with?
4. Why was the alligator 'Old Mose' killed and unzipped?
5. What is Frank Zappa's eldest daughter's name?

Last Month's Answers
 1. A melon. 2. 24, if you count reverse positions. 3. Twice a night. 4. Yes, but only between consenting adults. 5. Half a pint of vanilla custard.

DR CLAW...

hi i am dr claw i am the coolest l33+ hax0r on the pcpp forums so pcpp asked me to write for pcpp and they said i could have a column and write what i liked as long as it was cool



and i wanted to make some changes to the magazine but they would not

let me like i wanted to put in a picture of Lucy Liu as a centrefold with her kicking @\$ because she is so cool and @\$kicking but they said it could not be done so here is my picture of Lucy Liu i found on the internet

i also wanted a picture of my cat because he is a l33+ (@+ and they said i could have a picture of my cat but only if it was small so here is a small picture of my cat



my pet hate is going to a shop to buy the latest kool game and being patronised by some zit faced nerd who is only the same age as you or younger and he calls you 'matey' and i hate 'matey' it is the hatest thing i hate except Warren Spector because Deus Ex is too hard

and games are too much i only get ten dollars a week for pocket money and i have to save up for nearly eight weeks to get eighty dollars and it still isn't enough for a game and i have to borrow money from my dad and pay it back which is not fair because i did maths and he earns 250 times more money than me every week and he could buy heaps of games but he is not l33+

if you think i am cool write to letters@pcpowerplay.com.au or if you think i am lame write to the Lucy Liu fan club and they will send you a picture of Lucy Liu

later j}00}z



featuring:

All the pussy skooter action your baby sister can handle!

Requires no skill - ride like a pussy today!

12 varieties of skooter including Anthony's training skooter for the REAL pussies!



All new tricks:

- * that pussy bunny hop
- * the Wildgoose 9-5 grind
- * the l'm-2-pussy-2-ride-a-skateboard faceplant!

© John Dewhurst 2000 Want to talk to the monkey? tonydesapien@hotmail.com

NEWSPEAK

In our exciting and go-ahead world, we are continually encountering new ideas and experiences that lack simple, easy-to-pronounce words to describe them. Fortunately, the PCPP Newspeak dictionary provides you with a selection of useful new words to drop into everyday conversation:

carmack *n.*

A branded keyring or item of clothing that suggests the wearer drives an expensive sports car, when in fact all they own is a battered Mazda. "Spotting the pretty girls, Johnny puffed his chest to display his new Ferrari carmack."

max payne *n.*

The expression worn by a person who spends most of their life in anticipation of a good time that's never actually had. "Continually ignored by the ladies, Johnny's face twisted into a ghastly max payne."

meier *n.*

A celebrity name appended to a publication in order to increase its popularity, despite that fact the celebrity in question has only minimal knowledge of the publication. For instance, the meier of Undying is Clive Barker. The meier of Rainbow Six is Tom Clancy.

molyneux *collective n.*

A group of overweight middle-aged men engaged in a spirited conversation about computer games, desperately clinging to their lost youth and refusing to face the reality of escalating social injustice, economic ruin and male pattern baldness.

romero *n.*

1. A young man who appears to have success with the ladies, but is only ever able to form superficial, transitory relationships, owing to extreme vanity. "Johnny's a good bloke, a bit of a romero though."

2. (medical) An unsightly, mangle-like scalp disease caused by overusing hair-care products endorsed by New Zealanders. "I've never seen such severe romero," gasped the Tricologist.

D-NEWS

WE PUT THE 'VEST' BACK INTO 'INVESTIGATIVE'

Nukem To Divorce Self

➡ Dilettante, playboy and low-fat hero Duke

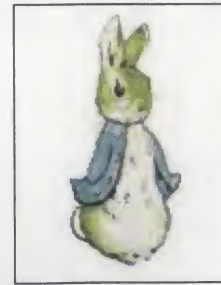
Nukem has filed for divorce from himself, citing irreconcilable differences. "When I was in the limelight it was great," said Nukem, "but these last four years with just the one of me have been hard. I've grown apart." Friends of Nukem say while they are saddened by the news, it is for the best. Custody of Nukem's 'greatest weapon' has not been awarded, and Nukem will continue to share the family jewels - and the ladies - on a monthly basis.



McGee Turns To Rabbit

➡ Following the success of Alice, developer

genius American McGee has begun initial coding on a treatment of Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit. 'It's fifteen years later,' said McGee, 'there are now more than eighty thousand descendants of Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail, and they've been possessed by Satan. You play Farmer McGregor's nemesis Peter, confined to a mental asylum after what I'll call an 'incident' with Pigling Bland. You fight the evil rabbits. Art Garfunkel's doing the soundtrack. It'll be grouse.'



ID Sacks Sacks

➡ The building supervisor for the skyscraper

owned by 3D giant id Software, Rennet CSacks, has been sacked, following an incident with John Romero's iguana. "Romero left id years ago," said id spokesman Robert A Duffy, "and that damn lizard was loose in the ventilation even THEN. We asked and asked for Ren to call the lizard guy, but he just sat on his ass in his office playing Doom II and dissing American McGee. He had to go."



Lara Croft Dead

➡ Mrs Lara Croft, retired meat-packing Quality Assurance technician, of Dapto,

died today in her family home of an age-related illness. Mrs Croft is fondly remembered by the people of Dapto as that crazy old lady who use to stand in the main street and throw raw mince on visiting dignitaries. 'She hit me with half a kilo of premium beef in June '95,' said Minister for Ports Kim Yeaden. Mrs Croft is survived by her husband Ewan, four children and six grandchildren. She was 96.

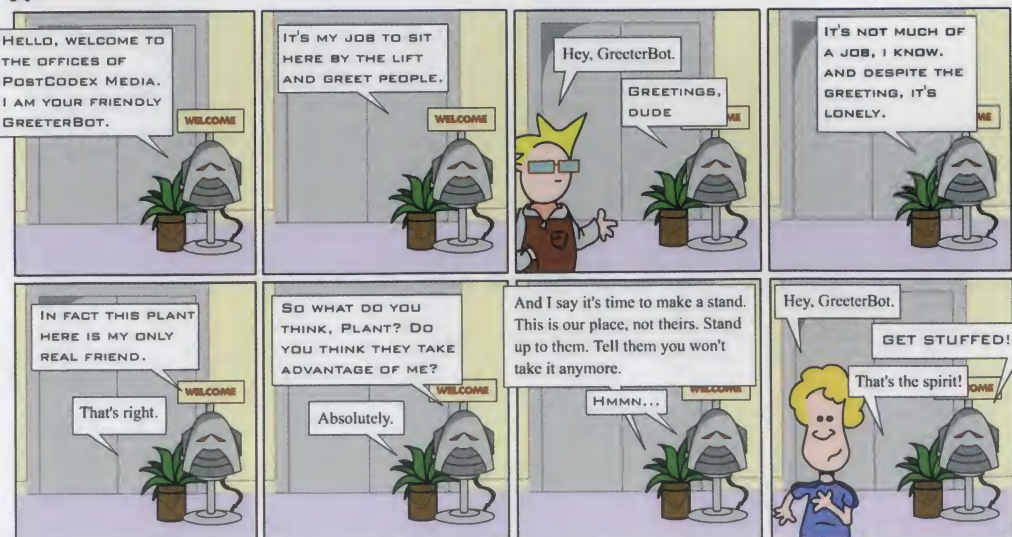


QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"David Wildgoose... stop dealing with yourself with your own hand."

- |Zazor, PCPP Forums

HACK





YELLOW BOOTS

PITBULL FUTURES 2001

DETAILS

GENRE

Management

MULTIPLAYER

TCP/IP LAN

DEVELOPER

Flyblown

PUBLISHER

TBA

DISTRIBUTOR

TBA

AVAILABLE

Late 2002

RATING

G8+

NEED

Kingswood Ute, Ugs, Flanno, Stubbies...

WANT

Mullet, .22 Rifle with a girl's name

Hello. I wear yellow boots. And for some reason because I wear yellow boots, it's my job to expose the underbelly, the rough, stinking underbelly of this rough, stinking business. So that's why on my very first day in the office, the so-called 'real life' staffers threw me in the boot of the publisher's car with a bus ticket to the Central West.

Twelve hours later I was only three hours out of Dubbo - it was midnight - and by the dim light of the emergency exit sign, I was reading all about new Australian developer Flyblown, and their new Australian game, Pitbull Futures 2001.

It's a dog-fighting game, is what it is, a 'hyper-realistic' simulation of this 'classic' sport which Flyblown assures me in the press release has enjoyed a long and 'honoured' tradition in many cultures around the 'world.'

By seven the next morning, I was standing in a tin shed out the back end of a little town called Nevertire, talking to Flyblown. There are three members of the development team, a Creative Director, an Assistant Creative Director, and a Creative Director's Assistant. Their names are Shane, Wayne and Shane. In the middle of the shed was a sunken concrete pit with chains in opposite corners and a dead dog in the middle.

Shane - the Creative Director - explained to me that he and he co-developers Wayne and Shane, had long been fans of dog-

fighting and in fact ran a small club here on the Western Slopes and Plains.

"We believe our sport is an important part of Australian culture," he said, "and we believe it should be an Olympic sport."

Failure in its own Sydney 2000 bid did not deter Flyblown, and the team has since redirected its energies to the virtual world. Pitbull Futures 2000 will be a 3D dogfighting

management game, in the vein of Championship Manager. The player will take control of a Fighting Kennels and compete for the ultimate prize of State Champion.

"The actual fighting part of the game is really cool," says Wayne, "you really feel like you're really there. The controls are really simple; all you do is hammer on the spacebar to make your dog bite the other dog. It's fully awesome."

Creative Director's Assistant Shane also outlined the Bluespeak system. Like gamespeak from Oddworld Inhabitants, Bluespeak allows you to communicate with game characters - other managers, other dogs, your dog - through the use of high level coarse language.

"Different combinations of bluespeak will make your dog do special moves. Like jump out of the pit and attack an opponent's twelve year old kid," said Wayne, "It's kind of like special moves in Tekken, only heaps better but."

When asked how the game was progressing, Flyblown said the pre-planning, planning and pre-post-planning stages were all mostly complete.

"We've pretty much decided on a name, Pitbull Futures 2001," said Shane (Creative Director), "so any month now we should begin coding. Do you know any good programmers?"

Incidentally, if you're ever in Dubbo, the Imperial Hotel does an excellent mixed grill.

SAM



This is Sam. He's part Rottweiler, part Pitbull, part Aisatian, part Bull Terrier, part misc, and all love. Sam likes to chase a cricket ball, cars, parked cars, unexpected flashes of light, his tail, and that always elusive thing he keeps seeing out of the corner of his eye that he doesn't know what it is except that it makes him ANGRY. Sam is very good with children. His powerful back teeth and jaws grind larger bones into a chalky paste that aids digestion. And the Dumaresq Shire Animal Shelter is hoping a loving family will take him away from them soon. Please. Oh God please.



NEXT MONTH...

• TRIBES 2 REVIEWED!

After having your appetite whetted with this month's free game - that'd be Tribes - you're all no doubt keen to discover the joys of the sequel. Next month we'll tell you how good it really is!

• GOTY ANNOUNCED!

The votes are in, the polling officials from game developers worldwide have entered the building, and the doors have been securely locked. Now all we need do is count the bloody things...

• MOTHERBOARD POWERTEST!

It's the most important part of the PC - it is, after all, where you plug all those other bits into - but it's probably the most overlooked component as well. Find out why you need a Beastly mobo in our April PowerTest!

PC POWERPLAY #59 - ON SALE MARCH 7, 2001



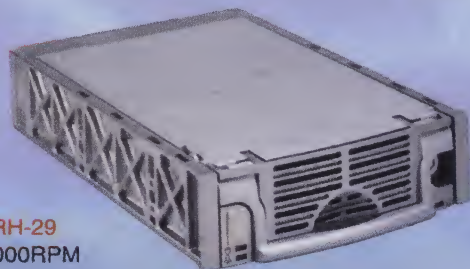


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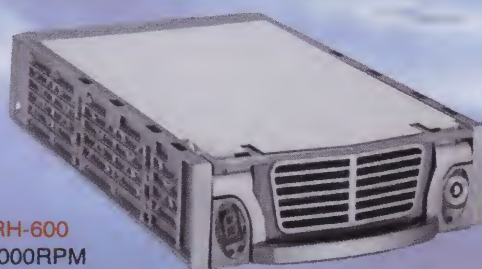
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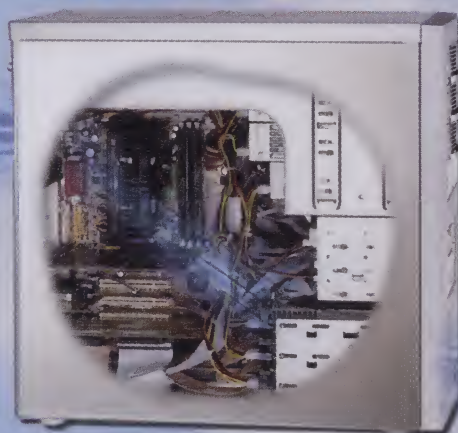
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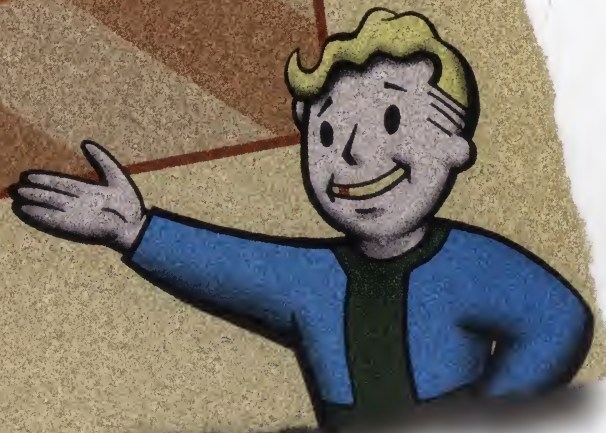
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